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ROBERT SOUTHWELL





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ROBERT SOUTHWELL, S.J.

From a pencil drawing at Stonyhurst College, England. Courtesy of  
Rev. W. J. Weld, S.J.



AN APPRECIATION OF  
Robert Southwell

By  
SISTER ROSE ANITA MORTON



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## PREFATORY NOTE

In this Appreciation of Father Southwell as man and poet, I have endeavored to present a more detailed account of the circumstances of his life than is usually offered in order to bring out the charming simplicity and virile strength of Southwell, the man. I have made no attempt to give a picture of the times in which Father Southwell lived and suffered, nor have I tried to justify his actions in defying the laws of Elizabeth because my chief interest has been in Southwell, the poet. His literary contribution, particularly his poetry, attests to his ability as a writer and obtains for him a secure position among the poets of the great Elizabethan age.

I have made an effort to account for the qualities of style peculiar to Southwell, and to discover the influences that affected his writing. I have tried to prove that his chief inspiration was his religion to which he clung with a tenacious devotion. I have, likewise, pointed out other influences which unconsciously affected his poetry, namely, the circumstances of his life, and the literary fashions especially as they appeared in the work of Sidney whose engaging prose and poetry possessed many merits and beauties that evidently appealed to the young priest.

I desire to acknowledge my obligation to the writings of two eminent Jesuits, Reverend Henry Foley, S.J., and Reverend Herbert Thurston, S.J. My indebtedness to their work appears on almost every page.

## PREFATORY NOTE

I wish to take this opportunity to thank all those who rendered me any assistance. I am grateful to my superiors for permitting me to pursue my study in the University of Pennsylvania where I have received the greatest courtesy and consideration. I am appreciative of the interest manifested in my work by other members of the community to which I belong.

My many obligations are fairly well indicated in the footnotes, but I am pleased to call particular attention to the help I received by the permission of Burns and Oates to use their publication—*Records of the English Province, S.J.* The editors of *The Month*, *The American Catholic Quarterly Review* and *The Catholic World* were equally gracious in allowing me the use of articles that had appeared in their magazines. Especially do I wish to acknowledge my debt to Reverend Charles F. Connor, S.J., for the volumes he borrowed from the various libraries of his Society; to Reverend Herman J. Heuser, D.D., who also procured books and gave me invaluable assistance by fruitful suggestions; to Reverend Howard A. Grelis, O.S.A., who was most cordial in helping me translate Father Southwell's Latin poems. The courtesy of Sister M. Aquin of the Sisters of Mercy placed at my disposal books which would otherwise have been inaccessible. Above all, I wish to record my debt to Professor Schelling, my devoted teacher and guide, without whose encouragement and scholarly assistance this brief monograph would never have existed.



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ROBERT SOUTHWELL





# I

## Robert Southwell the Man

IN Robert Southwell are combined with deep poetic feeling and true eloquence, great sanctity of life. To be at once a poet and saint is to have, according to Abraham Cowley:

The hard and rarest union which can be  
Next that of Godhead with humanity.<sup>1</sup>

Another writer of our own day has said that persecution makes of some men misanthropes, of others, saints; of Father Southwell it made a poet.<sup>2</sup> Few there are who will deny, I think, in Robert Southwell, martyr to his faith, were united the imagination of a poet and the character of a saint. In his short and busy life poetry was but a side issue, for his ambitions and ideals dwelt not on this world; long had he nourished in his heart the secret desire "to meet a glorious death for Christ." His verses, so popular that some of them were printed even by enemies to his faith, "demonstrate to the world that whilst there were many Jesuits, there was but one Southwell; and that to Queen Elizabeth belonged the distinction of having put him to silence."<sup>3</sup> Grosart has drawn attention to the fact that many of

<sup>1</sup> Abraham Cowley, "On the Death of Mr. Crashaw."

<sup>2</sup> *Catholic World*, LXXVIX, 783.

<sup>3</sup> I. A. Taylor, *Robert Southwell, S.J., Priest and Poet*, p. 1.

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Southwell's songs must have been written in the grim Tower of London.<sup>4</sup> When we remember that it was in prison he secured the leisure to write his poetry, we shall bring a fuller understanding and deeper appreciation to the inexpressibly tender pathos of his work.

The Southwells were an old family that had held various offices of state, dating as far back as 1450. Robert's great grandfather, Francis, was Auditor of the Exchequer to Henry VIII; his grandfather, Sir Richard, was not only Privy Councillor during the reigns of Henry, Edward VI, and Mary, but had filled amongst other posts that of visitor for the supervision of Religious Houses in Norfolk, and was lord of some thirty manors in that county. His father, another Richard, born out of wedlock, possessed, besides other Norfolk property, the house at Horsham St. Faith, about three miles from Norwich where our poet was born.

By odd circumstances, the birthplace of Robert Southwell had formerly been the site of a Benedictine Priory granted to Sir Richard Southwell in 36 Henry VIII, doubtless as a reward for his zeal in the work of suppressing the monasteries.<sup>5</sup> The exact date of Robert Southwell's birth cannot be fixed because we have no parish register for Horsham St. Faith's prior to 1620. As nearly as we can estimate, he must have been born in 1561 or 1562. On his mother's side he is the grandson of Sir William Shelley from whose family was descended the more famous English poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Alexander B. Grosart, *The Complete Poems of Robert Southwell, S.J.*, Introduction.

<sup>5</sup> Christobel M. Hood, *The Book of Robert Southwell*, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

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Little is known about the poet's infancy and childhood. There is, however, one incident recorded which might have had the effect of modifying to a marked degree his subsequent career. His home was situated in a district surrounded by the picturesque beauty of heath and woodland, a place to which vagrant gypsies frequently resorted. Upon one occasion, a member of the tribe, attracted by the uncommon beauty of the child, or actuated by the hope of a handsome reward for his return, stole him from his cradle. He was, however, speedily recovered by his nurse, to whom he ever afterwards showed a deep sense of gratitude. That this incident was often in his mind we can readily surmise from his own words. "What if I had remained with the vagrant? how abject, how destitute of knowledge or reverence for God! In what debasement of vice, in what great peril of crimes, in what indubitable risk of a miserable death and eternal punishment I should have been." <sup>7</sup>

In the days when Southwell languished in prison, if his mind reverted to this episode, he must have thought how differently his life might have ended had his nurse been less vigilant. But Father Southwell entertained no desire that anything should be different. For his Lord's dear sake, he was willing to endure all, and suffer all, that so he might "be dissolved and be with Christ." No need to commiserate that one so attractive, mentally and physically, should come to the tragic death meted out for him under the laws of Elizabeth. He realized that ambition—the honor and glory of a martyr's death—which cannot be regarded as a calamity, even though it robbed him of all that life holds dear. "Our Lord," he once said, "has hitherto granted

<sup>7</sup> W. B. Turnbull, *The Poetical Works of Robert Southwell*, p. xiv.

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me all the favors I have asked of Him. I ask Him now the grace to suffer much and to die for him.”<sup>8</sup>

Catholics found the education of their children a difficult problem under the penal laws of Elizabeth. The queen had it within her power to make statutes, ordinances, and rules for existing schools and she determined that all educational institutions should assume a Protestant character. Laws were made from time to time so that it was impossible to receive an education and not conform to the Church of England. By one of the first acts of her reign she decreed that to obtain a university degree, the applicant must take the oath admitting the supremacy of the Crown in all matters—spiritual and temporal.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, a fine of ten pounds a month was inflicted on anyone keeping a schoolmaster who did not attend Protestant service, and the schoolmaster himself was to be imprisoned for one year. For these reasons, Southwell, like many other Catholic youths, was sent to the English College at Douai, founded by Cardinal Allen to afford facilities for exiled Catholics to continue their studies. Allen himself had been principal of St. Mary's Hall, Oxford, but upon the accession of Elizabeth, left England and founded in 1568 the English College at Douai where there was a new university already under Oxford influence and where Allen became Regius Professor of Divinity. In the course of time, however, Douai developed into a missionary college for educating priests to return to England and preach the Roman Catholic religion.<sup>10</sup>

At Douai Southwell received instruction from the celebrated

<sup>8</sup> *Catholic Record Society Publications*, V, 303.

<sup>9</sup> *Cyclopaedia of Education*, II, 432.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 96.



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Father Leonard Lessius, S.J.; and later going to Paris, he, fortunately, came under the care and instruction of Father Thomas Derbyshire, "an exile from England for conscience' sake."<sup>11</sup> Upon the accession of Elizabeth, Father Derbyshire had surrendered the Archdeaconship of Essex together with an ample fortune, "preferments and dignities which in reward for his piety and learning had been bestowed upon him." During his exile he joined the Jesuits, so that again Southwell was brought into immediate contact with the Society that fired his youthful imagination. From these circumstances it would appear that his parents at this time favored the "Old Religion," although we know from the poet's own letters that, later, his father and one of his brothers had ceased to be conforming Catholics.

Details of this period are scarce, but Robert Southwell's early piety naturally led him to the priesthood. For three months he was undecided as to whether he should join the Carthusians or Jesuits. He finally decided upon the latter, a choice that may have been the result of association with zealous and exemplary Jesuit teachers, but more than likely it was the courage and heroism of the Jesuits, at that time the most conspicuous figures in the Church, which appealed to his ardent nature. Once his choice was made, he desired immediate admission into the Society, but his request was refused on the score of his extreme youth. He expressed his disappointment at the enforced delay of the accomplishment of his ambition in a lengthy and finely written lament in English prose.

In this "Complaint" he says that "the day of his espousals has passed. The good seed planted by God Himself had already

<sup>11</sup> *American Catholic Quarterly Review*, VIII, 429.

taken root and sprung up when this sudden tempest blighted his hopes." He compares himself to Agar cast forth from the house of Abraham, and he claims he has a greater cause for grief, because excluded from a more worthy family. "For who can hinder my dying of grief when I behold myself parted from that company, separated from that society, torn from that Body, wherein my very life, my love, my whole heart and every affection are centered?"<sup>12</sup> These words, as well as his subsequent action, are typical of the youthful poet. He could not be satisfied to remain contentedly in Paris and patiently await admission into the Society. Inspired by a holy enthusiasm to dedicate his life to God as soon as possible, he journeyed to Rome accompanied by John Decker, who likewise desired to enter the Jesuit Novitiate. Here he was received as one of the children of St. Ignatius, on the Vigil of St. Luke, October 17, 1578, before he had completed his seventeenth year.

Grosart has drawn attention to the significance of the date. "It was on the Vigil of St. Luke (October 17th): and it is pleasant to conclude that as the Vigil of St. Luke was also St. Faith's Day (old style), he chose that day in honor of his native place, Horsham St. Faith's."<sup>13</sup> Dr. Grosart may be correct in this particular, but we may also look upon it as a happy coincidence. If he had the privilege of selecting his entrance day and chose this day purposely, we may conclude that his thoughts were in England, and that this stripling of seventeen was even then yearning to help, spiritually, his suffering countrymen.

His joy upon being admitted to the Society knew no bounds.

<sup>12</sup> Henry Foley, *Records of the English Province*, pp. 304-7.

<sup>13</sup> Grosart, *op. cit.*, p. xli.

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The St. Omer MS states that Southwell's principal motive for entering the Society was that he might earn the triple crown of "virginity, learning and martyrdom" which appeared to him to be nowhere more attainable.<sup>14</sup> Indeed it became the personal ambition of young Southwell. How much the idea possessed his heart and mind may be gleaned from his letters to his friends as well as from his personal notes. It was almost the beginning and end of every sentence.

After his reception, he spent a considerable portion of his novitiate at Tournay, in Belgium, lest being unused to the extreme warmth of Italy, his ardent zeal, united to the influence of the atmosphere, might have affected or destroyed his constitution. For the same reason we read of his compatriot, Father Henry Walpole, S.J., likewise from Norfolk, being sent from Italy to Ponte-a-Mousson, in Lorraine, and from thence to Flanders.<sup>15</sup> Upon the completion of his two years' noviceship at Tournay, during which he was remarkable for every virtue, he took the first vows of the Society of Jesus, October 18, 1580. Then he was sent back to Rome to make his course in philosophy and theology. The outside world seldom learns anything of the life of a Jesuit during novitiate and scholasticate, that happy and sacred time during which he receives a training in the spiritual life. The hardship and rigors he therein endures are for him, throughout his life, happy memories of his early fervor and his devotion to the cause that led him to become a soldier of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is ample evidence, however, to prove that during this period of his life, Father Southwell was highly esteemed for learning and piety. His own notes furnish

<sup>14</sup> *American Catholic Quarterly Review*, VII, 430.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, p. 210.

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the record of his spiritual life and of his constant endeavor to bear in mind his duties as a member of the Society of Jesus and the necessity of molding himself upon the model placed before its disciples.

At this point it might be well to indicate in a general way the education which the young Southwell had received at the hands of the Jesuits. It did not differ, in content, to any marked degree, from what he could have obtained in any of the better humanistic schools of the period. Since the plan of studies drawn up during the generalship of Claudius Aquaviva did not appear until 1599, Southwell's course was probably that devised by Father Lesdema who had been a distinguished scholar at the Universities of Alcala, Paris, and Louvain.<sup>16</sup> He was prefect of studies and teacher at the Roman College almost from his entrance into the Society in 1557, until his death in 1575. His program practically contains, in outline, all points which were, later on, laid down in the "Ratio Studiorum" concerning classical studies.

Emphasis was placed upon classical training, Latin taking precedence over all other subjects. The readings included such authors as: Cicero, Ovid, Tibullus, Catullus, Virgil, the Latin Fathers, the Gospels in Latin and Greek, Homer, St. Chrysostom, St. Basil, the Epistles of Plato, Aristotle, Gregory Nazianzus. It must not be concluded that the young Southwell received no training in the vernacular and that the study of his mother tongue was neglected. As early as 1560 Father Jerome Nadal had exhorted the Jesuits to cultivate the vernacular and find a good method of teaching it.<sup>17</sup> In the vernacular, orators, historians,

<sup>16</sup> Robert Schwickerath, *Jesuit Education*, p. 107 ff.

<sup>17</sup> Patrick J. McCormick, *History of Education*, p. 241.



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and poets were read and imitation of their style encouraged in scholastic exercises. We know that Southwell set himself very definitely to acquire a facility in the use of his own tongue and to have the ability "to compose the quaintest of poetry in it must have demanded several years of close reading of the best authors" in the English language.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to a literary training his philosophy course included mathematics and the natural sciences. His study of scholastic philosophy prevented the narrowness of a purely humanistic curriculum and furthered that wider expansion of college work already noticeable in the schools of the Italian Renaissance. So highly was Southwell's learning esteemed that he was chosen to make a public defence of the whole course of philosophy, an honor accorded him because of the brilliant record he had made during his scholasticate.

After completing his course in theology, he was ordained in the summer of 1584, and immediately appointed to the responsible post of Prefect of Studies at the English College at Rome. The high reputation the college enjoyed required for this office a man of great learning and strength of character; both qualities were to be found in the young Father Southwell. He fulfilled to the letter the duties imposed upon him by this responsible position, and took the opportunity, according to Bishop Challoner, of "applying himself to the study of his native language, in which he proved no small proficient, as the elegant pieces, both in prose and verse, which he has published in print, abundantly demonstrate."<sup>19</sup> Not only his learning but also his charm of manner and holiness of life made him revered. His writings of

<sup>18</sup> *American Catholic Quarterly Review*, XL, 510.

<sup>19</sup> Foley, *op. cit.*, p. 312.

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this period are all full of a spiritual character, and abound in pious maxims of which the following is typical: "The love of God is inseparable, insuperable, insatiable."

Scarcely emerged from boyhood, holding a responsible and honorable position in his community, Father Southwell never for a moment lost sight of his one worldly desire—to die for the Faith. He appears to have looked upon this period as a prelude to the serious business of life and a preparation for that future martyrdom which he never regarded as a mere possibility.

About this time, he apparently felt some anxiety concerning the spiritual welfare of his family. His father, Richard, was a man of the world, a time-server employed at the court and proud of his high standing there. He desired to retain his wealth and social position; besides, he had contracted a marriage with Margaret, daughter of John Styles, parson of Ellingham, a lady of the court of Elizabeth, formerly governess to the Queen.<sup>20</sup> For these reasons he, for a time, had abandoned the practice of his religion, and with his son Thomas, who had also grown weak in faith, had probably conformed to the Established Church. In a letter to Father Robert Parsons, written shortly after the execution of Father Campion in 1582, Father Southwell begs him to communicate with his relations and ascertain their spiritual condition.<sup>21</sup> In 1586 to his great joy, he was assigned what he called "the perilous mission" in England. He had thought of asking to be sent to India, a mission which would afford the best chance of obtaining that martyrdom on which his heart was set; but latterly, he had felt that his desire could be more surely gratified in his native land, "where the savages were not heathen

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 301.

<sup>21</sup> Hood, *op. cit.*, p. 11., p. 32.

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but Christian." The Jesuit mission in England had really been undertaken at the suggestion of Dr. William Allen. In Rome at the newly founded English College, in charge of the Jesuits, dissensions arose, the students complaining that their Jesuit superiors were making use of the college to attract promising young men to their own order, thereby diverting their interests from the English mission. Dr. Allen having come to Rome for the purpose of reconciling the conflicting interests urged upon the General of the Society that he should send some of the Jesuits into England as auxiliaries of the secular clergy.<sup>22</sup> After grave consideration on the part of the Jesuit superiors, the English mission was inaugurated in 1580, by Fathers Parsons and Campion; the latter was executed in 1581 at Tyburn. At that time religious intolerance and persecution were at their height. Desperate as would have been an attempt of the little band of Jesuits to try to wrest from the sovereigns of England their newly acquired spiritual prerogatives, yet the methods employed by England to prevent the establishment of the Jesuit mission indicate the importance she attached to it, and the apprehension it inspired throughout the country.

The increased severity of the penal laws in no way deterred the young Southwell from his desire to reach England and serve his co-religionists. Before he sailed for his native land he knew that the laws of Elizabeth had ordered the penalty of a traitor's death on all native-born subjects who, having been ordained to the Catholic priesthood since the first year of her reign, ventured to stay in England more than forty days. Before leaving Rome he had written to Claudius Aquaviva, the Father General of

<sup>22</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*, XLIII, 412.

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the Jesuits, telling him of his eager desire to reach England. He wished to be of some service in the country where persecution was rapidly thinning the ranks of the priesthood. He longed, he said, for the opportunity to lay down his life and was ready for the rack and the gallows.

Father Southwell embarked for England on May 8, 1586, in company with Father Henry Garnet, afterwards Superior of the English Jesuits, who himself received the martyr's crown in 1606, being accused of complicity in the Gunpowder Plot. The two priests, disguised, landed safely on the English coast on the 7th of July, 1586. The greatest precautions had to be taken for their advent was during a most disturbed period when the course of political intrigue for and against the unfortunate Queen of Scots, had established a reign of terror over the Catholic community.<sup>23</sup>

Great, therefore, was the danger which Fathers Garnet and Southwell incurred by landing. Although their arrival became speedily known to the Government, yet, fortunately, they at that time escaped and were hospitably received and entertained for some months in the house at Hackney, of William, third Lord Vaux of Harrowden, a place that was a safe sanctuary for priests and recusants.<sup>24</sup>

We must not omit here to mention one of Father Southwell's first acts after his return to England, namely, his setting out to find the old nurse who had rescued him from the gypsy—and this in the hope of converting her. Likewise, he wrote a yearning, affectionate letter to his father, begging him to be mindful

<sup>23</sup> *Catholic Record Society Publications*, V, 319.

<sup>24</sup> Hood, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

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of his soul and to return to the use of the sacraments. Though it stands as an example of Southwell's earliest prose, nevertheless, one can see it was inspired by the soul of a poet. It is human and tender,—a son's letter to a dear father. His appeal to his brother is shorter but not less fervent. Both appeals bore fruit, and Father Southwell had the great happiness of seeing his father and brother reconciled to the Church.

The information which we have concerning Father Southwell's movements at this time, is obtained chiefly from letters addressed by him to the General of the Society. In one, he states that he had been well entertained, had said Mass on 22nd July, St. Mary Magdalen's day, and had found the Catholics who had complained of having been forsaken by the Society greatly encouraged by his arrival. Another letter to the Father General dated December 21, 1586, begs that he have "sent to us those faculties we sought for, especially to consecrate, chalices, and super-altars. Of a truth the one remaining solace of the Catholics amid all this trouble and turmoil is to refresh themselves with the Bread of Heaven; which if it be taken away, it cannot be but that many will faint and grow feeble, whose piety and constancy was heretofore nourished and increased at this table."<sup>25</sup>

Father Garnet and his youthful companion were not to be the only representatives of their Order in England. They were reinforced by Fathers Oldcorne and John Gerard; to the latter we are indebted for an interesting autobiography in which he tells of his numerous hair-breadth escapes, in many of which Father Southwell shared. He speaks in glowing terms of Father Southwell as "excelling in the art of helping and gaining souls,

<sup>25</sup> *Catholic Record Society Publications*, V, 314.



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being at once prudent, meek, pious, and exceedingly winning.”<sup>26</sup> Father Garnet writes of a narrow escape they all had upon the occasion of their meeting at the home of the daughter of William, Lord Vaux, for the purpose of renewing their vows. Father Garnet, who was much disturbed and felt a premonition of impending danger, warned them to disperse as soon as they could reasonably do so. It was not possible, however, for all to leave at once, some seven priests being obliged to remain. At five o'clock the next morning, when Father Southwell was beginning Mass, of a “sudden arrives a Queen's messenger—rosaries, chalices, sacred vestments, all other signs of piety are with the men thrown into a cavern covered with water at the bottom, and in this refuge the future martyrs stood for four hours until the priest-hunters had gone some distance from the house after satisfying themselves that no suspicious persons were harbored there.”<sup>27</sup> From extant letters we learn that Father Southwell's treason against the sovereign was merely his presence in England, for he had no other mission to perform than that of “wandering tirelessly up and down the country like his Divine Exemplar,” doing good and, as he himself says, “preparing an abundance of the Bread of Angels for the repast of persecuted Catholics.”<sup>28</sup> When he had been but a little more than two years in England, the nation was convulsed by the most momentous event of Elizabeth's reign, the arrival and destruction of the Spanish Armada. The attempted invasion made the position of Catholics more precarious than ever, and it must have been to Southwell, as to other Englishmen, a time of intense excitement.

<sup>26</sup> John Morris, *The Conditions of Catholics under James I*, p. xxv.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxix-xl.

<sup>28</sup> A. C. Klass, S.J., *Catholic World*, CXXVI, 469.

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National and traditional pride as well as the sympathy of race and blood could not but have been awakened in our poet. Writing to Claudius Aquaviva, on August 31st, Southwell grieves over the fact that the rulers of the land, having survived the peril of the Armada and having disbanded the army, should turn arms "from foreign foes against their own sons, and with inhuman ferocity vent the hatred they have conceived against the Spaniard on their own fellow-citizens and subjects."

Father Southwell had assumed the name of Cotton and as such traveled about on his apostolic mission. He became domestic chaplain and confessor to the Countess of Arundel, whose husband, Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel, was imprisoned in the Tower where he died, one of "the noblest victims of the jealousy and suspicious tyranny of Elizabeth." Lady Arundel's home became Southwell's permanent resting-place, and it was there he composed for the Earl's use, "Consolations for Catholics," a work pervaded by a sympathetic love that makes it dear to suffering hearts. From these headquarters he visited such localities as stood in need of ministration, fearlessly going through all Sussex and the surrounding territory, daring to venture even into the heart of London.

For about six years, he had labored with great zeal and success on his apostolic mission, when suddenly his priestly ministrations were abruptly ended by his betrayal into the hands of the pursuivants through the treachery of "false brethren."

At Uxenden Hall there lived a very ancient and staunch Catholic family named Bellamy, whose stubborn adherence to their religion was well known to the authorities. One of them, a Mr. Jerome Bellamy, with his family, had suffered severely for relieving Babington and a few of his companions by allowing

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them to sleep in the barn and by sending the poor famished men a little food. Richard Bellamy, Jerome's cousin, made of his home a general meeting place for the members of his faith; and thither, Father Southwell was in the habit of going to administer the sacraments and give religious instructions, as Fathers Campion and Parsons had also done. Ann Bellamy, Richard's eldest daughter, had in her early youth exhibited marks of the most fervent piety. Her courage and fearlessness attracted the attention of Walter Copeland, the Bishop of London, who had her committed to the Gatehouse Prison at Westminster as an obstinate recusant. In the tainted atmosphere of a prison where the influence of the informer Topcliffe was paramount, poor Ann Bellamy yielded to temptation and lost both faith and virtue. Father Barnes, a secular priest banished in 1603, tells in his speech at his own trial in 1598, the whole sad story of the poor girl's seduction from the path of virtue. "She had not been there six months," he says, "but was found in a most dishonest order, and before six weeks more was delivered from prison by Mr. Topcliffe's means upon bail not to depart above one mile from the city."<sup>29</sup> Released from captivity, she was permitted to occupy a lodging in Holborn but appears to have been completely at the mercy of Topcliffe and to have become his tool and agent. That she might obtain money, she determined to take advantage of the recent statute of Elizabeth, which made the harboring of a priest treason, with confiscation of the offender's goods. She was induced to betray Father Southwell on the solemn promise that no one in the house where he was taken should be molested. After having given her consent to the plot, she was at a loss how to ac-

<sup>29</sup> Charles Dodd, *Church History of England*, III, 197.

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comply with her treachery. On one occasion, her brother Thomas, unaware of the disgrace into which she had fallen, called to see her. She pleaded with him to take her to see Father Southwell whom she praised highly for his learning and virtue. Previously, it appears, she had written to her sisters imploring them by their sisterly love for her, that they acquaint her at once if Father Southwell were to come to their house, as she wished to consult with him. Though she implied that she desired to confer with him on matters spiritual, the brother and sisters did not accede to her request, but the unfortunate girl found other means of securing her victim. From her former relations with Father Southwell, she well knew that the thought of personal danger would never deter him from bringing the consolations of religion to a soul. Accordingly, she begged him to meet her at her father's house on a certain day. Learning that her brother Thomas had business on Fleet Street, she effected a meeting there between him and Father Southwell. The latter stopped Thomas, claimed acquaintance with him as a countryman of his mother's, asking him to stay with him that night and next morning to show him the way to Uxenden. Thomas complied; the following day they started at ten o'clock and by noon arrived at Mr. Bellamy's house.<sup>30</sup>

Topcliffe was all that day at court with the Queen at Greenwich, but he had had his horses ready for more than three weeks. Upon receiving all the particulars from Ann with full directions as to how to know the house, he set out and reached Uxenden about midnight. Ann's father was not at home and her family, still ignorant of her fall from virtue, could not under-

<sup>30</sup> Foley, *op. cit.*, p. 351. *The Rambler*, I, 108.

stand how Topcliffe knew the precise place where Father Southwell was sleeping. Topcliffe arrested the priest and carried him off to London, inflicting upon him every insult and cruelty of which that arch-torturer was capable.

Among the Bishop of Southwark's manuscripts there is an account of the apprehension of the Jesuit, Robert Southwell, which asserts that "because of the often exercise of the rack in the Tower was so odious and so much spoke of by the people, Topcliffe had authority to torment priests in his own house in such sort as he shall think good."<sup>31</sup> In fact, he himself boasted that he had a machine at home of his own invention compared with which the common racks in use were mere child's play. The account of his cruel treatment of Southwell would be incredible if it were not confirmed in his own hand-writing. The indignation among both Protestants and Catholics was so great that in order to stem the tide of popular feeling Cecil was obliged to take action and ordered Topcliffe to be arrested and imprisoned under the pretense of having exceeded the powers given to him, but the imprisonment did not last long.<sup>32</sup> Father Gerard further stigmatizes the character of Topcliffe in his narrative of the Gunpowder Plot when he speaks of him as "the cruellest tyrant of all England, a man most infamous and hateful to all the realm for his bloody and butcherly mind."<sup>33</sup> Into the custody of this priest-hunter did Ann Bellamy betray good Father Southwell.

When Father Southwell's captor reached London, he pretended to be very angry with Ann for her audacity in making an appointment with a priest, and committed her to the Gatehouse

<sup>31</sup> *The Rambler*, I (February 1857), 108-18.

<sup>32</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*, LVII, 53.

<sup>33</sup> Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 18.



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where she remained until July; then he removed her to Greenwich, and had her married to Nicholas Jones, his servant.

Of the capture of Southwell, Topcliffe wrote exultingly to the Queen:

"Most gracious Sovereign, having Father Robert Southwell (of my knowledge), the Jesuit in my strong chamber at Westminster Churchyard, I have made him assured for starting or hurting of himself by putting on his arms a pair of hand gyves: and here and so can keep him either from view or conference with any, but Nicholas the Underkeeper of the Gatehouse and my boy: Nicholas being the man that caused me to take him by setting of him into my hands ten miles from him.

"I have presumed (after my little sleep) to run over this examination inclosed, faithfully taken and of him foully and suspiciously answered, and somewhat knowing the nature and doings of the man, may it please your Majesty to see my simple opinion, constrained in duty to utter it.

"Upon this present taking of him, it is good forthwith to enforce him to answer truly and directly, and so to prove his answers true in haste, to the end that such as he deeply concerned in his treacheries have no time to start or make shift.

"To use any means in common prisons either to stand upon or against the wall, his feet standing upon the ground and his hands but as high as he can reach against the wall, like a trick at Freshemeare, will enforce him to tell all and the truth proved by the sequel.

"The answer of him to the question of the Countess of Arundel and that of Father Parsons, deciphereth him. It may please your Majesty to consider that I did never take so weighty a man; if he be rightly used . . . So humbly submitting myself to your

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Majesty's directions in this, or in any service with any hazard, I cease until I hear your pleasure, here at Westminster with my charge and my ghostly father this Monday, the 26th day of June, 1592." <sup>84</sup>

Topcliffe imprisoned Father Southwell in his own house, and as he states in his letter, bound him in irons, hoping thereby to worm out of him a confession; but the martyr would divulge not even his name, lest by so doing, he might incriminate those who had befriended him. The full particulars of all the tortures endured by the martyr have never been accurately known. Father Tanner, in the "Societas Jesu Martyr," tells that at one time he was suspended from the wall by his hands, with a sharp circle of iron around each wrist pressing on the artery, his legs bent backwards and his feet tied up so that his toes might not touch the ground. During the few weeks he remained at that house, he was put to torture ten times with such dreadful severity that at his trial he called God to witness that "for the ten times he had been tortured he would rather have endured for each ten deaths."

Nothing could daunt the martyr, no torment that the diabolical mind of his persecutors could devise could shake his constancy or draw from him more than that he was a priest, a member of the Society of Jesus; had come to England to preach the Catholic faith, and was ready to give his life for the cause. "You will give me death," he said, "and I shall receive the martyr's palm. Never shall I pay all that is worth."

It is recorded that, on one occasion, Topcliffe suspended him as described, went off to the city and left him in that position

<sup>84</sup> Foley, *op. cit.*, p. 354.

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for seven hours, at the end of which time, the holy man appeared to be dying. Topcliffe, returning, took him down, and administered restoratives. After he had vomited a great quantity of blood, he was hung up again in the same position by that inhuman monster, yet the sufferer maintained an inflexible silence; nothing could shake his constancy, and the tormentors said that he was more like a post than a man.<sup>35</sup> Sir Robert Cecil testifies to his fortitude in these memorable words: "Let antiquity boast of its Roman heroes, and the patience of captives in torments: our own age is not inferior to it, nor do the minds of the English cede to the Romans. There is at present confined one Southwell, a Jesuit, who, thirteen times, most cruelly tortured, cannot be induced to confess anything, not even the color of the horse whereon, on a certain day, he rode, lest from such indication his adversaries might conjecture in what house or in company of what Catholics, he that day was."<sup>36</sup> On all occasions, no matter how long or severe the torment he had endured, he was ever patient, sweet and amiable, so that the servant in attendance began to look upon him as a saint. No word of complaint ever fell from his lips; continually he was heard to exclaim: "Deus tibi Se, tui te Deo"—"God gave Himself to thee; give thyself to God."

On June 30, after some four months in Topcliffe's house, he was removed to Gatehouse, in care of the husband of the unfortunate girl who had betrayed him. Cast into a hole, noisome and vile, among the pauper prisoners, he was left in a neglected condition for a whole month, enduring hunger and thirst, cold and filth. When his father came to see him, he found his son in

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 362.

<sup>36</sup> Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 18, Foley, *op. cit.*, p. 362.

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a most pitiable condition; his whole body was covered with dirt and swarming with vermin; maggots crawled in his sores, his face was bleared, and like that of a corpse, and his bones almost protruded through his skin.<sup>37</sup> Immediately, the father sent a petition to the Queen, humbly entreating "that if his son had committed anything for which by the laws he had deserved death, he might suffer death; if not, as he was a gentleman, he hoped her Majesty would be pleased to order that he should be treated as a gentleman, and not be confined any longer in that filthy hole." The Queen took cognizance of the petition, ordered that Southwell be removed to the Tower, and gave his father permission to supply him with clothing, necessities, and books. Of these last, however, he asked only for the Bible and the works of St. Bernard. At the Tower he remained for three years at his father's expense.

What really took place during those days of close confinement at the Tower will till eternity remain a blank. His sister Mary, married to a man named Bannister, had access to him two or three times, but aside from the fact that he discoursed on religion with her, we know nothing. She probably received permission to visit her brother because she was in the habit of passing for a Protestant; no Catholic would have been granted the privilege. Nevertheless, while we are deprived of historical facts concerning this period, there are told several incidents that occurred during the saint's incarceration. So loved was he that some of his penitents, yearning for a glimpse of him even at a distance, used to disguise themselves and gain entrance into the Tower-garden under the pretext of purchasing flowers. There they watched

<sup>37</sup> Foley, *op. cit.*, p. 358.

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until he came to the little window of his cell and recognized them by making signs. They then knelt for his blessing which he bestowed upon them from where he stood.<sup>38</sup> We know that communication between prisoners immured in the Tower was not impossible and apparently one of the keepers, in his rounds, carried messages from one to the other. The lieutenant seems frequently to have spoken to Lord Arundel of Southwell's virtue and was much impressed by his holiness. On one occasion, we hear that the Earl Arundel's dog had entered Southwell's cell with one of the prison guards. Arundel being told of the dog's visit replied that he loved the animal the better for it. To the jailer's scoffing remark that perhaps the dog had gone to seek the Jesuit's blessing, Arundel made answer, that it was no news for irrational creatures to seek the blessing of holy men.<sup>39</sup>

We owe to Father Garrold, S.J., one of the most pathetic stories linked with the name of Father Southwell.<sup>40</sup> It has to do with the son of the prison warder and the children of another family whose father was also employed in the Tower. This latter family consisted of father, mother and three children,—a girl and two boys. One of the boys was dumb, and the dumbness was a great trial to the poor father and mother. They had prayed earnestly but no relief came. The mother had consulted the Wise Woman who lived in a hut among the marshes, and she had put her long, skinny finger upon the little boy's tongue, mumbling charms and burning something black in a caldron. The only result from this was to give the afflicted child horrible dreams which tormented him for a month.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 363.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 337.

<sup>40</sup> R. P. Garrold, *The Man's Hands and Other Stories*.

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No one knew of the black, rebellious thoughts that possessed the child himself. How could a good God make the mistake to give him a tongue that would not talk? His brother and sister tried to make up in every way that he might not feel too keenly his terrible deprivation. When they were especially loving and told him stories that stirred his youthful imagination, he became gay and happy and found it easy to love and trust the God who had given him a brother and sister, affectionate and attentive.

Now the warder's son, William, and these children were fast friends; and it was through William that our little boy had the adventure which led to the accomplishment of his life's desire. William met him and his brother one day and invited them to accompany him rat-hunting. He carried a bag containing two ferrets to run down the prey. If he secured a sufficient number, he intended selling their skins and would share the profits with his friends. The proposal was very tempting, and soon the three were off in pursuit of their game. They successfully captured seven rats and in running down the eighth were led out to a little square courtyard in which was a hole about four feet deep at the foot of which was a window looking out into the hole from the prison. There at the bottom crouched the rat, and close to him, thrust through the iron bars of the window, were two hands protecting the rodent. At the sight of human hands, pushed out as it were from a veritable tomb of death, the children were so scared that they ran away. They could not, however, forget the "man's hands"—especially the little dumb boy, who at the first opportunity, returned to the hole to see them again. Sorely disappointed was he to find no hands there; but as he stood looking down, he could hear a man in the prison singing a pleasant, cheerful song in a clear voice. The song being finished, the hands



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came through the grating. As soon as the child saw them he determined to get nearer the owner and slipped down into the hole. Now the wall behind the grating was so thick, that, peer as he might, he could not see the face of his new friend, who, conscious of his visitor, opened conversation. The boy pulled out the card which he always carried with him and wrote, "Sir, I cannot speak at all, for I am dumb."

After that introduction, they found no difficulty talking to each other and the child always came from his visit consoled and happy; thus a loving intimacy grew up between the two because of each other's sorrows.

The beautiful stories the captive told the boy of the King he served filled the child with a desire to know and love this King. Day and night he thought of his friend in the dungeon, particularly of his hands. One night in a dream he saw them scarred and wounded; next day he hastened to his friend and behold the hands were not those he had learned to know and love, but the hands he had seen in his dream. Moved by a passionate longing in his heart, he yearned to touch them, to soothe them. He did so, and as he clasped them, the soul within cried out, "Oh sir, that I may speak with my tongue!" He stooped to kiss the hands and knew his prayer had been answered. Contending emotions of gratitude and sorrow filled the heart of the child—gratitude for the gift he had received, sorrow that in his own happiness he must leave his friend in the dungeon; and again and again he kissed the hands that had been used only to do good to others.

Upon his return home, his mother was the first to discover the marvel, and for some days he found himself the center of interest. He was shown off to visiting friends, taken to those

who could not come to see him, so that the poor boy had no time to himself nor could he get near the dungeon. At the first opportune moment he hastened to the hole but no hands appeared. Strange hissing sounds he heard, and upon their cessation he jumped down to the dungeon window to tell his friend what the King had done for him. What grief filled his little heart when he heard that this was possibly their last meeting. The one grain of comfort he had was to know that his friend's sorrow would soon end, and that he hoped to meet face to face the King he loved and served. The boy begged to know the prisoner's name, and the name he heard was one we hold now in reverence as that of the martyr, Father Southwell, the Jesuit. Many other stories have centered about the name now so honored, for Father Southwell impressed everyone by his high-minded principles, his charming personality, and the holiness of his life.

But let us return to facts. After a close detention of almost three years in the Tower, Father Southwell wrote to the Lord Treasurer, Cecil, "humbly entreating that he might either be brought to trial to answer for himself, or at least that his friends might have permission to come to see him." It is said that Cecil replied that if he was in so much haste to be hanged he should quickly have his desire. Orders were given that he be removed from the Tower to a subterranean dungeon in Newgate known as "Limbo" where he remained for three days.

On the twenty-second of February, without any previous warning to prepare for his trial, he was taken from his cell and hurried to Westminster to plead his cause. At the prospect of his approaching martyrdom, Southwell could not conceal his joy. He was conveyed to the King's Bench, where Sir John Popham, Lord Chief Justice, was presiding. As soon as the

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prisoner was brought in, Popham delivered a long and vehement address in which he denounced priests in general and Jesuits in particular. Sir Edward Coke, Solicitor General, drew up a bill of indictment against Father Southwell to this effect:

“Middlesex.

“The jury present on the part of our sovereign lady the Queen, that Robert Southwell, late of London, clerk, born within the kingdom of England; to wit, since the feast of St. John the Baptist, in the first year of the reign of her Majesty; and before the 1st of May, in the thirty-second year of the reign of our lady the Queen aforesaid, made and ordained priest by authority derived and pretended from the See of Rome, not having the fear of God before his eyes and slighting the laws and statutes of this realm of England, without any regard to the penalty therein contained, on the 20th day of June, the thirty-fourth year of the reign of our Lady the Queen, at Uxenden in the county of Middlesex, traitorously and as a false traitor to our said lady the Queen, was, and remained contrary to the form of the statute in each case set forth and provided, and contrary to the peace of our said Lady the Queen, her crown and dignity.”<sup>41</sup>

Ordered to the bar, he readily obeyed. Leake describes the scene thus: “The father being brought along with halbutts and bills and his arms tied with a cord, pressed with the throng, at the length came to the bar; and then having his hands loosed, put of his hat and made obesance.”<sup>42</sup> He was required to answer to the charges preferred against him. Holding up his hand as was the custom, he replied when asked whether he was guilty

<sup>41</sup> Foley, *op. cit.*, p. 365 ff.

<sup>42</sup> *Catholic Record Society Publications*, V, 334.

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or not: "I confess that I was born in England, a subject to the Queen Majesty, and that by authority derived from God, I have been promoted to the sacred order of priesthood in the Roman Church, for which I return most hearty thanks to His Divine Majesty. I confess also that I was at Uxenden, in Middlesex, at that time, when, being sent for thither by trick and deceit, I fell into your hands, as it is well known; but that I never entertained any designs or plots against the Queen or Kingdom, I call God to witness, the revenger of perjury; neither had I any other design in returning home to my native country than to administer the sacraments according to the rite of the Catholic Church to such as desired them."

The judge prevented him from further speech asking him by whom he would be judged. "By God and by you," was his reply, refusing at first to make use of the customary formula, "By God and my country," saying that the law of the land was disagreeable to the law of God and that "he was unwilling that those poor harmless of the jury" who were obliged to represent the country, should be in any way responsible for his death.

The Chief Justice and Coke having addressed the jury, a verdict of guilty in accordance with the existing statute was returned. To the poet's credit it may be said that he answered fearlessly and honestly the questions put to him, but as Cecil's scoff had implied, only one verdict would be rendered. Nothing but surrender on the part of the holy martyr could avert it, and if torture of the severest kind could not change his mind, it was not possible to move him now when the martyr's crown was almost within his grasp.

Father Leake says, "The jeuri, not staing above a quarter of an houre, retourned saying, 'Guiltie,' and so the father lifting up

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his eis and hands, having the cord tied about his armes, which for the time of his being at the bar was loosed, was sent back to Newgate. Who was led along the street, notwithstanding at the bar the attorney bid them carrie him by water." <sup>43</sup>

With the return of the jury's verdict the case was at an end, and the judge pronounced the sentence in the usual form. The prisoner, courteous to the last, bowed low and expressed great thanks for the favor accorded him. He declined the service of a minister to prepare him to die, saying that the Lord Chief Justice need not trouble himself on that score, that the grace of God would be more than sufficient for him. He was led away by the court officers who consulted among themselves as to whether they had better carry him by water or by land. They all agreed that he would go quietly to his execution, and so he went joyfully on his way through the streets where his friends and acquaintances had gathered to await his coming. To their comfort and satisfaction they perceived his countenance brightened by the light of the soul within; every gesture and motion of his body discovered to their eager gaze that though his body was worn by imprisonment and torture, and though the ignominy of a felon's death confronted him, his spirit was still unbroken; the old dauntless courage was apparent to the end.

Having reached Newgate, he was again imprisoned in the dungeon. During the afternoon he was visited by three ministers who tried even then to reason with him upon points of religion. What really took place at those interviews was known to very few. Likewise, it is said that during the evening a man of prominence, an official, called upon him and endeavored to make him

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, V, 335.

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acknowledge he had aimed to subvert the allegiance of the English people. The St. Omer MS records that in reply, the man of God said, "that anything of the kind was most remote from his plans or thoughts, that he had come all the way from Italy, and, regardless of the danger, had crossed the sea, spent several years in an inglorious obscurity, had endured the squalor of a long imprisonment, with the torments of the rack and other tortures, and was now to undergo the punishment of a most disgraceful death—and all this for the sole object of seeking the salvation of his fellow-countrymen, using every convenient opportunity of nourishing them by counsel and the sacraments of the Church, and in this cause he regarded both fame and life as worthless."<sup>44</sup> The remainder of the night he spent in prayer, directing his thoughts to the martyrdom and to the reward that was laid up for him in a happy eternity, where he would enjoy forever the Divine presence, the only object of his love. In justice to the jailer at Newgate it should be said that he tried to make Father Southwell's last night on earth a little more bearable by showing him whatever kindness he could. The night wore away, and the morning that was to see the accomplishment of the one and only desire of the martyr, dawned. The jailer, appearing at his cell, informed him that he was to die that morning; that shortly he was to be drawn to Tyburn to be executed. The victim's cup of happiness was full, and embracing the man, he said, "You could not bring me more joyful tidings. I regret that I have nothing left of greater value, but accept this nightcap as evidence of my gratitude." Although a Protestant, nothing could induce the jailer ever to part with the poor priest's last gift. Led out of the prison he was placed, as was the custom of

<sup>44</sup> Foley, *op. cit.*, p. 372, n. 79.



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the time, upon a hurdle, a rude wheelless vehicle drawn by horses, and dragged from Newgate to Tyburn, a journey of three hours.

On this "via dolorosa," he was heard to say repeatedly, "How great a preferment is this for so base a servant!"

Among those who came forth to see the Jesuit driven to his execution, he discerned the faces of many friends. An old countryman, moved by his suffering, cried out that he prayed God in heaven to bless and strengthen him. Immediately the old man was rebuked but he would not desist from praying for the priest. At another spot, a kinswoman, possibly the "loving cousin" to whom he dedicated his verses, pushed through the crowd to ask for his prayers.

"Good cousin, I thank you, I pray you to pray for me." He cautioned her, with his customary gentleness, to take heed of the horses, and for fear lest she be apprehended, to forbear any further speech.<sup>45</sup> She moved away immediately. His last farewell spoken, he was left alone to hold communion with his God.

Finally, Tyburn was reached; upon seeing the gallows, he tried to raise himself to behold it joyfully, but lay down again. Taken from the hurdle and unbound, he wiped on a handkerchief the mud cast on his face by the jolting of the sledge. Among the bystanders he recognized a brother Jesuit, and threw the handkerchief—his last gift—toward him, by whom it was given to Father Garnet, from whose hands it passed to Father Aquaviva, the General of the Order.

It appears that the civil authorities were not a little anxious about the result of Father Southwell's execution on account of the reputation he enjoyed from all who had come in contact with

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 373.

him. Topcliffe and his kind were the only ones not loud in praise of his virtue and humility. Therefore, lest there be any disturbance at Tyburn, they took care not to let people know beforehand the day on which he was to die. Moreover, on that same day a notorious highwayman was ordered to be executed at the same time in another place, to divert the attention of the public from the martyrdom of one of nature's noblemen. But their efforts were of no avail, for a great concourse had assembled to see the last gallant fight of the holy man.

After he was transferred to the cart placed under the gallows, the noose was slipped about his neck. He asked of the hangman permission to speak, and making as best he could the sign of the Cross, he began by quoting from St. Paul, saying, "Whether we live, we live in the Lord; or whether we die, we die in the Lord: therefore, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord."<sup>46</sup> Seeing that he was addressing the multitude who by their silence and decorum testified their admiration of the martyr, he was interrupted by the under-sheriff who bade him call on God for mercy and make an end.

"Give me leave to speak," he pleaded, "it shall not be much, and I will speak nothing offensive to the Queen or the State." Permission being granted, he continued: "I am come to this place to finish my course, and to pass out of this miserable life, and I beg of my Lord Jesus Christ, in whose most precious passion and blood I place my hope of salvation, that He would have mercy on my soul. I confess I am a Catholic priest of the Holy Roman Church, and a religious man of the Society of Jesus, on which account I owe eternal thanks and praises to my God and Sav-

<sup>46</sup> Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans, XIV.

our." Here he was interrupted by a minister who was immediately silenced by the bystanders. Father Southwell resumed, "I beg of you not to be troublesome to me for this short time that I have to live. I am a Catholic, and in whatever manner you may please to interpret my words, I hope for salvation by the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ." As to the Queen, he again maintained his innocence of any treason against her, and declared he had always prayed for her welfare, and for all England.

This speech, which was firmly delivered, greatly affected his audience, who had power to do naught for the holy servant of God as he prepared for his approaching death. He asked for perseverance to the end through the intercession of our Blessed Lady and the Saints, and signing himself with the sign of the Cross, prayed: "Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit; thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth, My God and my all." The cart was softly drawn away, but the noose had been so unskillfully adjusted that the neck was not broken. He remained hanging alive for some time, striking his breast, and making as well as he could the sign of the Cross. Even the executioner was moved to mercy and to ease his agony pulled him by the legs. And thus the heroic Jesuit martyr was strangled to death February 22, 1595. So impressed was the crowd by the victim-priest that when, according to the terms of his sentence, "hung, bowelled and quartered," the executioner wished to cut him down alive, the people as well as the magistrate who superintended the execution, prevented him, shouting angrily, "Hold, hold." Not until the priest was dead was he cut down, and "when his severed head was lifted up in sight of the people, the crowd failed to hail it with the customary cry of 'traitor,' but were awed and silent."

It is said that his countenance exhibited no change nor did the halter leave on him the ordinary marks of discoloration. When his body was quartered, the heart leaped in the executioner's hand; but later it was cast into the fire. His head was set on one of the bridges, and his quarters on the four gates of London.

Many who were present were very much touched by the sublime sentiments expressed in his last earthly moments; among them was Lord Mountjoy, who exclaimed: "I cannot judge of his religion; but pray God, whensoever I die, that my soul may be in no worse case than his."<sup>47</sup> Father Southwell's earthly career had ended; death had no terrors for this young man of thirty-three. Conscious of having done no wrong, he rejoiced at suffering in the best of causes. His heroic death, ending all his earthly wrongs and sorrows, was the crowning act of his noble life. Since even his enemies attested to the gentleness and amiability of his character, it is no surprise to learn how beloved he was by his friends and brother priests. In the centuries that have passed since Father Southwell laid down his life, there has been no writer who has not regretted the law that silenced this sweet singer; none who has not attested to his personal influence, his high character, his brilliant gifts, his courage in defense of his religious principles. To this gallant young man may be applied the words of his great contemporary:

I do not think a braver gentleman  
More active—valiant, or more valiant-young,  
More daring, or more bold, is now alive,  
To grace this latter age with noble deeds.

King Henry IV, Part 1st, V. I.

<sup>47</sup> Hood, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

## II

### Robert Southwell the Poet

IN the character of Elizabeth were combined the qualities of a man and a woman. Masculine she was, in her patriotism, her intellectual powers and her grasp of politics; feminine in her vanities, her scheming, her intuition. A skillful diplomat, she succeeded in gathering her people about her and she became the concrete embodiment of their ideals. Under her wise policy, the nation grew in wealth and power; the perils that had threatened England had passed; and with their passing came a new spirit into the land. The defeat of the Spanish Armada taught Englishmen their own strength; it marked a turning point in the history of the country, and further developed the unity and national consciousness that their popular sovereign had instilled in them. Unconsciously they began to realize that the crown instead of being a weapon of defense might prove an obstacle in their march of progress. Besides, Elizabeth was growing old; the heyday of her reign had passed and "her declining age though still glorious, was discontented and unhappy."

It is not surprising to note that with the change in the political spirit there arose at the same time a thoughtful, reflective literature and that a "graver poetry written by men of piety and philosophy became prominent in the last decade of Elizabeth's reign."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Cambridge History of English Literature*, IV, 146 ff.

Within this decade Robert Southwell wrote the poems which gave him the title to being, specifically, the only important religious poet of the Elizabethan Age. Notwithstanding the remarkable lyric outburst at the end of the sixteenth century when everybody seemed suddenly to be inspired with the gift of lyric expression, the period was not rich in purely religious poetry. At one time or another every poet tried his hand at writing a religious poem; even so, "the whole body of religious verse if collected, would not amount to a large total."

Southwell's poetry deals almost entirely with religious and moral subjects, but he displays an elegance and fascination of treatment that holds the interest of the reader; however, let us turn aside for the moment to his other works since, as a writer, Father Southwell's earliest expression was in prose. In his short biography attention has already been called to his lament at not being received into the Society of Jesus, which lament, according to the St. Omer MS, is at this day preserved in the English College at Rome.<sup>2</sup> His letters of 1589 to his father and brother, expressing his concern about their spiritual lives, are not only of biographical interest. These early pieces show the spirit animating the writer, the very earnestness of which cannot conceal his poetic soul. During this same year (1589) he was appointed Chaplain and Confessor to Anne, Countess of Arundel. While living with this noble family, Southwell kept a private printing press; but apart from the "Epistle of Comfort" which he composed for the Earl, it is not definitely known what use he made of it, though Father Gerard says that from it were "issued his incomparable works."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Foley, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

<sup>3</sup> Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 71.



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This address, first circulated in manuscript but afterwards printed in 1593, shows Father Southwell at his best as a prose writer. The language is simple and vigorous; the thoughts are striking and are freighted with an abundance of spiritual consolation. Nowhere is the fervent piety, which marked everything that Southwell wrote, more apparent. As a judicious critic observes, "Even those who least love the religion of the author must admire and praise his writings."<sup>4</sup> The zealous young missionary produced no finer work than this address, "To the Reverend Priests and to the Honourable, Worshipful, and Others of the Lay Sort, Restrained in durance for the Catholic Faith." Almost every day he heard of some of his fellow-workers or members of his Church apprehended. Small wonder that he should exhort them to constancy by painting the greatness of their reward and by urging them not to let the joys that are certainly awaiting them slip from their grasp.

"The Triumphs over Death," was written in 1591 to console Philip Howard, head of the noble house of Arundel, for the loss of his beloved sister, the Lady Margaret. At the time of her death, the Earl had been six years a prisoner in the Tower; Lady Margaret, his half-sister, though she too suffered for her religion, still enjoyed some measure of favor at court in virtue of her husband's Protestantism, while Anne, Philip's countess, was hated by the Queen and resolutely kept at a distance. Lady Margaret died at the age of twenty-nine leaving four children; to them, Southwell's piece was dedicated. Its purpose is to check overgrief, yet Southwell eulogizes the lady's character with a

<sup>4</sup> Note found in *The Prose Works of Robert Southwell*, edited by W. Joseph Walter. The editor quoted from *Censura Literaria*, Volume I.

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fervor that shows the tender regard he had for Lady Margaret of whom he wrote:

Of Howard's stem a glorious branch is dead.

This elaborate little panegyric was issued by Valentine Simms in 1595, and again in 1596. A certain John Trussel in an acrostic on Southwell's name, addressed to the Reader, describes the "Triumphs" as the "first of Southwell's quill." Accepting this, we may conclude that from the time it was written in 1591, until it was printed in 1595, this eloquent tract was circulated in manuscript. Literature of all kinds was distributed in manuscript copies in Elizabeth's reign; and it was a common practice to transcribe even voluminous documents. We shall have occasion to see, later on, that other works of Father Southwell were thus disseminated. Southwell dwells on the life and virtues of Lady Margaret and has painted a character so beautiful that time has but added to its charm; his exuberant fancy has gathered the "rarest gems of thought—a rosary of sweet consolations to the mourning souls for whose benefit it was strung together."<sup>5</sup>

In the same year, 1591, "Mary Magdalen's Funeral Tears" was published by Gabriel Cawood, a warden of the Stationers' Company. In their Register appears the following entry: "Master Cawood: Entred for his copie (i.e., entered as a book belonging to him) under the hand of the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury. A booke entituled, 'Mary Magdalen's Funerall Teares.'"

This work, like the others, appears to have had a wide cir-

<sup>5</sup> *Catholic World*, XXXII, 129.

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culuation before it reached print. It is interesting to note that the Stonyhurst MS differs greatly from the piece as it finally came from the printer. Written at the suggestion of Mistress Dorothy Arundel shortly after Father Southwell's arrival in England, the work was dedicated to her. The "Address to the Reader" is interesting and explains the difference between the Stonyhurst MS and the final text:

"And if necessity (the lawless patron of enforced actions) had not more prevailed than choice, this work, of so different a subject from the usual vein, should have been no eye-sore to those that are pleased with worse matters. Yet sith the copies flew so fast and so false abroad, that it was in danger to come corrupted to the print, it seemed a less evil to let it fly to common view in the native plume and with its own wings, than disguised in a coat of bastard feather or cast off from the fist of such a corrector as might hapely have perished the sound, and impeded in some sick and sorry feathers of his own fancies."

Apparently then, Southwell had authorized an edition of this work and probably revised his early copy, which is the Stonyhurst MS before it went to print. Between 1591 and 1634, about ten editions appeared, some of the editions, however, contained his poetry as well as his prose. From the very beginning this pious tract enjoyed a popularity. It was the best-known of Father Southwell's works and the only one published by Protestants during his lifetime.

Mary Magdalen's tears are the outward manifestation of her grief upon discovering that her Master's tomb was empty. Mary knew her own weaknesses, and remembering where the pursuit of worldly love had formerly led her, she feared that her love

for her Master might languish if it had not "his words to kindle it, his presence to cherish it, nor so much as his dead ashes to foster it."

The treatise is full of choice bits of phrasing, the product of a vivid imagination written in the heightened and, at times, almost euphuistic style so popular in his day. Many of the illustrations which are to us commonplaces appear to have been original with him.

The work called forth many imitations, to some of which, however, there is attached a degree of probability. The title and treatment of Southwell's lament may have suggested to no less a person than Thomas Nash, the ideas for "Christ's Tears over Jerusalem." Nash's longest work, it is a "rather enigmatic expression of repentance for the loose life of himself and his congeners." Nash's enemy, Gabriel Harvey, accused him of imitating Southwell's work:<sup>6</sup>

"Now he (Thomas Nash) hath a little mused upon the 'Funeral Tears of Mary Magdalen,' and is egged on to try the suppleness of his pathetical vein."

And again:

"I know not who weeped the 'Funeral Tears of Mary Magdalen': I would he that sheddeth the pathetical 'Tears of Christ,' and trickleth the liquid tears of repentance, were no worse affected in pure devotion." If imitation of "Mary Magdalen's Funeral Tears" in this instance is not clearly made out, there can be no doubt about a work printed in 1595, entered in the Stationers' Registers of that year as "a boke entituled 'Mary Magdalen's Love' upon the XXth chapter of John, the first

<sup>6</sup> Harvey Gabriel, "New Letter of Notable Contents," *Illustrations of Early English Literature*, II, 13.

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verse to the 18th." It resembles Southwell's so closely that it might be taken for another copy of the original work under a new title. The notice of the only extant copy contained in Corser's "Collectanea Anglo Poetica" indicates that it is another work entirely, undertaken by someone to whom the subject appealed and who was anxious to write in the same vein.<sup>7</sup>

Thomas Lodge, who had "his oare in every paper boat" but whose versatile fancy was best employed with romances and lyrics, not only shows that he was influenced by Southwell's work, in his "Prosopopea" containing the "Teares of the holy, blessed and sanctified Marie, the Mother of God," but refers to Southwell in such a way that it is not possible to think Lodge meant any other writer: "Others have wept, as Peter his apostacy, Mary her loss and miss of Christ, their tears wrought from them either for repent or love." There can be no doubt about the works to which he calls attention since this tract and "St. Peter's Complaint" were the best-known of Father Southwell's compositions. Lodge appears to have returned to Catholicism and, as a practising physician in London, was much patronized by Roman Catholic families.<sup>8</sup> His knowledge of Southwell's works and his imitation of one of them, for this reason, becomes all the more interesting.

Nicholas Breton, the prolific writer of pastoral, satirical and humorous verse was moved to imitation of Father Southwell's work in a religious poem, "The Blessed Weeper." He holds to the same Gospel verses used by Southwell, but in justice to Breton it is noteworthy that he took nothing more than the general idea from the earlier work. In 1599 we find in Stationers'

<sup>7</sup> Herbert Thurston, *The Month*, March, 1895.

<sup>8</sup> *Chambers' Cyclopaedia of English Literature*, I, 103.

Register an entry of, "A Triplicity of the Mind's Passion, the first expressing Mary Magdalen's Seven Lamentations for the Love of Jesus." This may be the poem attributed to Gervase Markham who never hesitated to borrow from the works of any author whatever appealed to his fancy or promised well for his purse. It was printed in 1601 and again in 1604, under the title, "Mary Magdalen's Lamentations for the Loss of her Maister Jesus." A comparison between the work of the two writers shows that Markham has some original ideas in the poem, but on the whole, it is merely a skillful rendering of the prose work of Southwell.

At least six more pieces were printed all of which showed traces of Southwell's influence, and as late as 1659 appeared a work entitled, "Mary Magdalen's Tears Wiped Off, or the Voice of Peace to an Unquiet Conscience." From the popularity this little tract enjoyed, it would seem that "the world was kinder to the man's works than to the man himself."

"A Shorte Rule of Good Lyfe" was written "to direct the devout Christian in a regular and orderlie course."<sup>9</sup> This work, possibly printed at his private press before 1592, since the Stonyhurst MS copy is dated 1589, was dedicated "to my deare affected friend, M. D. S., Gentleman."<sup>10</sup> It is entered in the Stationers' Registers, November 25, 1598, under the name of the bookseller, John Wolfe. Anyone who is familiar with the principles laid down by Ignatius Loyola in his "Spiritual Exercises" will appreciate from this little work how well the disciple had imbibed the spirit of the master. Apart from the shortcomings

<sup>9</sup> *Bibliographical Dictionary of the English Catholics*, V. 517.

<sup>10</sup> The copies in the Lambeth Library and in the Bodleian have no indication of place or printer's name.



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involved by the character of this theme, Southwell writes with an originality, an intellectual force, and a religious passion which make his tracts very different from the commonplace presentation so frequently offered in similar works.

To this period also belongs an eloquent protest against the proclamation of a more rigorous enforcement of the penal laws, called, "A Humble Supplication to Her Maiestie." It was probably written in 1591 before Southwell's imprisonment which occurred in 1592, but was not printed until 1600 although it bears the date 1595. In connection with this pathetic appeal for toleration, the following letter of Francis Bacon to his brother Anthony<sup>11</sup> may be interesting to show how highly the works of Father Southwell were regarded:

Good Brother,—I send to you the "supplication" which Mr. Topcliffe lent me. It is curiously written, and worth the writing out for the art; though the argument be bad. But it is lent me but for two or three days. So God Keep you.

From Gray's Inn, this 5th of May.

Your entire loving Brother,

FR. BACON

The fact, that this work of Southwell's attracted Bacon throws light upon some of the questions then engaging the attention of Parliament. Bacon himself had given the subject of toleration his earnest consideration because of the agitation between the High Church and the Nonconformists or the Puritans as they were beginning to be called. It might be expected that Bacon would read widely and would be curious to know what a man like Southwell had to say on the same topic. In the summer of

<sup>11</sup> James Spedding, *The Letters and the Life of Francis Bacon*, II, 368.

1589, Bacon drew up the manuscript the "Advertisement touching the controversies of the Church of England" which was first printed in 1640, again in 1657 and again in 1663 when the question of toleration to Dissenters was raised under Charles II. Bacon's views on toleration are clearly set forth, and as his biographer says, "though addressed especially to the parties and the events of the year 1589, may be read with advantage by all parties and in all times."<sup>12</sup> Bacon's tract differs from Southwell's in treatment and in subject matter, but it is interesting that both treatises were written about the same time, circulated first in manuscript, printed years after they were written, Bacon's even later than Southwell's. In view of these facts we can appreciate the motive which led Bacon to read "A Humble Supplication" as well as his object in sending it to his brother.

Once again we may call attention to the common practice of circulating literature in manuscript copies especially that which was "worth the writing out for the art."<sup>13</sup>

In this well-reasoned supplication, Southwell calls the Queen's attention to the great cruelty with which the laws are enforced and points out that "recusancie or refusal to be present at the protestants serviuce" is a matter of conscience with Catholics.

One other prose work has been ascribed to Southwell, "A Hundred Meditations on the Love of God." It was edited with a preface by John Morris, S.J., 1873. The manuscript from which this volume was printed is the property of Stonyhurst College, and it is probably the only extant copy. Father Morris remarks that the transcriber's dedication to Lady Beauchamp states that

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 73.

<sup>13</sup> Two copies of the "Supplication" are at Lambeth, one at the British Museum, and another in manuscript in the Inner Temple Library.

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the copy was made by him from the martyr's autograph.<sup>14</sup>

Thurston does not agree with the editor as to the identity of the Lady Beauchamp to whom the "Hundred Meditations" is dedicated. Morris takes Lady Beauchamp to have been Honora, the daughter of Sir Richard Rogers, of Brianston, County Dorset, and he infers that Lady Beauchamp's "holy mother" spoken of in the Dedication, was Cecilia, the daughter of Sir Andrew Luttrell. Thurston feels sure Lady Beauchamp was one of the daughters of Lady Margaret, half sister of his friend, Philip, Earl of Arundel. He says:

"Lady Margaret Sackville, Earl Philip's sister, though she died at the age of twenty-nine, had borne her husband six children, four of whom survived her. Of these four, one was a girl, christened Anne—may we not conjecture that the choice of the name was promoted by her friendship with her sister-in-law, the Countess of Arundel—and this Anne Sackville married eventually Edward Seymour, the grandson of Edward, Earl of Hertford, who, from 1612 until his death in 1618, was known as Lord Beauchamp. His wife, who survived him, was married a second time to Sir Edward Lewes, of Eddington, Wilts, by whom she was again left a widow some time before 1630, for in that year, administration of his goods was granted to her under the style of Lady Anne Beauchamp. Remembering the intimate friendship between Father Southwell and his penitent, Lady Margaret, it is impossible to doubt that the Lady Beauchamp, to whom this copy of the Meditations was dedicated by its transcriber, must have been Lady Margaret's daughter, Lady Anne. In this way, the reference to Father Southwell's affection for her

<sup>14</sup> "A Hundred Meditations on the Love of God," p. xi, *ibid.*, p. xix.

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'holy mother' is easily explained, while a new light is shed upon the deeply spiritual character of the Lady Margaret when we remember that it was for her use that these glowing outpourings of Father Southwell's devotion were originally designed."<sup>15</sup>

If, twenty-five years later, another article on "A Hundred Meditations" had not appeared, there might have been no difficulty in accepting Father Thurston's opinion of the dedication. Father C. A. Newdigate has endeavored to prove that the writer of "A Hundred Meditations" is not Southwell but a Franciscan Friar, Diego de Estella, a well-known writer and preacher of his day, and confessor to Philip II.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless without passing on the question here, it is easy to see how the Meditations came to be ascribed to Southwell. They read like his work, especially in the illustrations the writer employed. For example, the editor calls attention to the use he thought Father Southwell here made of the lessons in falconry given him by Father John Gerard. We know Father Southwell had found it necessary to get instruction in one of the chief pastimes of the day, that he might be able to converse on subjects harmless and interesting, and at the same time, avoid suspicion.<sup>17</sup> It would have been typical of him to turn this information to a spiritual purpose and use the thoughts suggested to him by falconry in meditation.

These are the only prose tracts attributed to Southwell that were printed. They were the outcome of the man's inner life and "his sympathy for the sad, the unwary, the tempted, the doubting, the tried." Despite fondness for figurative expression

<sup>15</sup> Thurston, *The Month*, June, 1900.

<sup>16</sup> *The Month*, November, 1925, pp. 6-8.

<sup>17</sup> Morris, *op. cit.*, p. xxiii.

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and conceit, its redundancy, and not infrequently, artificial construction, his prose is not so far removed from naturalness as we might expect. He wrote at a time when English was often unconsciously translated Latin, hence we find rhetorical ornament, stately sentences and a preference for ornate writing. His prose works, like his poetry, frequently rise above mere literary criticism, for to him was given the facility to express feelings that almost surpass the power of words. His prose writings may no longer be interesting to the general public, though the Catholic will find much that is familiar both in matter and expression; however, the pure devotion which inspired Father Southwell lends to these little tracts a charm that can hold even a modern reader. Southwell's prose, while inferior to his poetry, has merited high praise. The form only is prose, the matter is poetry, often of a sublime character expressed with scholastic finish and a fine literary polish.<sup>18</sup>

His poetry has been continually eulogized by Protestants and Catholics alike reflecting as it does a poet, a mystic, a saint, a martyr, and above all, a man whose character combined strength with tenderness and united a wide, clear intellectual comprehension with a deeply spiritual temperament. It reveals an enthusiasm for a faith of which he can write with an intensity of emotion, and a positiveness of belief that admits of no doubt or misgivings. The knowledge, that many of his poems were born of "grief that had no grievance," of pain that asked no relief, of suffering that endured bravely, of heroism that taught him to look across the bridge of time to the glorious shore of eternity, gives an added charm to the work of this gentle young poet.

<sup>18</sup> *American Catholic Quarterly Review*, XL, 513.

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His zeal in sacrificing his life for a losing cause, may be disputed by many not in sympathy with his faith and its teachings. How Southwell, who was so naturally gifted could apparently

Throw away the dearest thing he ow'd,  
As 'twere a careless trifle

merely to adhere steadfastly to a religion in which he had been reared and in which he believed with all the ardor and intensity of his being, is to some, inexplicable. No one, however, will deny that in him his Church has an advocate whose life and works plead eloquently in her favor.

Shortly after his death in 1595, his poems were issued from the press, and at least sixteen editions of them appeared during the next forty years. Undoubtedly, most of his poetry was written in prison, which fact accounts to some degree, for the character of his work. His religious fervor which animated every action found a natural and unforced expression in his poetry where he recorded "the hopes, the fears, the pathetic weariness of English Catholics." It carried a message "to the sorrowful and serious of soul, to the meek and the devout. Meanwhile, the Old Faith and New ceased their warfare to listen."<sup>19</sup> From the very beginning his poetry was popular, notwithstanding that it was the work of a proscribed Jesuit and that it was unlawful to own any "book of papistry" as Southwell's poems would have been styled. The reason for Southwell's popularity is an interesting question. Certainly, it was not due to recognition given him by contemporary writers, for apart from Ben Jonson's unstinted praise of "The Burning Babe," there is no record of any

<sup>19</sup> *Catholic World*, LXXVIX, 777 ff.



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especial notice given him by the literary critics of the time, even though we know they read his works and we can trace, without difficulty, many of his thoughts and expressions in their own productions.

Between 1595 and 1609, eleven editions of Southwell's works were published and this during a period when countless pieces were written in imitation of "Venus and Adonis," celebrating love; and an abundant prose drama and verse were jubilantly singing of England's glory. Stopford Brooke remarks upon the strange contrasts of the time when there was a taste for poetry so widely different in theme.<sup>20</sup> Whatever motives readers had in perusing Southwell—whether appreciation for his literary worth, or idle curiosity in the subjects he treated—their interest in his poetry set in motion ripples in the stream of literature that widened into the circle that included Herbert and Crashaw and the seventeenth century divines.

Thurston accounts for Southwell's popularity by maintaining that he was read by Catholics who, even at the close of the reign of Elizabeth, were still numerically powerful.<sup>21</sup> Southwell, he says, was not read merely for the sake of his poetry, but for the spiritual food his poetry contained. The numerical strength of Catholics is also attested to in a letter ascribed by Spedding to Francis Bacon.<sup>22</sup> Written in the 80's, the letter is addressed to the Queen:

"As far then (dread sovereign) as I may judge, the happiness of your present estate can no way be encumbered but by your strong factious subjects and your foreign enemies. Your strong

<sup>20</sup> Stopford Brooke, *History of English Literature*, p. 87.

<sup>21</sup> Thurston, *The Month*, March, 1895.

<sup>22</sup> Spedding, *op. cit.*, I, 47.

faction subjects be the Papists: strong I account them because both in number they are (at the least) able to make a great army, and by their mutual confidence and intelligence may soon bring to pass an uniting: faction I call them, because they are discontented; of whom in all reason of state your Majesty must determine, if you suffer them to be strong, to make them better content, or if you will discontent them, to make them weaker: for what the mixture of strength and discontentment engender, needs no syllogisms to prove."

If then, great numbers of Elizabeth's subjects adhered to the Old Religion, it is not hard to understand why booksellers would risk publishing works that dealt with themes like life's uncertainty, the world's vanity, the crimes and follies of humanity, the consolations and glories of religion. Topics like these, had a strong appeal in those days for Catholics. Moreover, it is not tenable that booksellers in the last decade of the sixteenth century and the first of the seventeenth, any more than in our own day, filled up their stock with books for which they could find no purchasers. Whatever conclusions we may draw for the interest manifested by Southwell's contemporaries in his poetry, we can entertain no doubt as to the motive that led him to literature.

The zealous young missionary had read the best authors in the English language,<sup>23</sup> and his own words testify that he read the works of his contemporaries. It would be difficult to imagine Southwell, possessed as he was of a poetic soul, and a mind keen and brilliant, not interested in reading the great Elizabethans, writers who possessed a most lavish and amazing creative en-

<sup>23</sup> *American Catholic Quarterly Review*, XL, 510.

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ergy. Indeed his own words prove that he was well acquainted with the character of the poetry then fashionable. He felt that many of the writers of the day were making a misuse of their poetic gifts. We can easily imagine the gentle priest shaping his course to sing of higher things for higher ends. Like Milton at a later date, he aimed to rescue the art of poetry from the worldly uses to which it had been almost entirely devoted.<sup>24</sup> In a preface to his poems he says:

"Poets by abusing their talent and making the follies and faynings of loue the customarie subject of their base endeuours, haue so discredited this facultie, that a poet, a louer, and a lyer, are by many reckoned but three words of one signification. But the vanitie of men cannot counterpoyse the authoritie of God, who deliuering many parts of Scripture in verse, and, by His Apostle willing vs to exercise ovr deuotion in hymnes and spiritual sonnets, warranteth the art to be good, and the vse allowable. And therefore not onely among the heathen, whose gods were chiefly canonized by their poets and their Panim diuinitie oracled, in verse, but euen in the Olde and Newe Testament, it hath beene vsed by men of greatest pietie, in matters of most deuotion. Christ Himselfe, by making a hymne the conclusion of His Last Supper, and the prologue to the first pageant of His Passion, gaue His Spouse a methode to imitate, as in the office of the Church it appeareth; and to all men a patterne, to know the true vse of this measured and footed stile. But the deuill, as he affecteth deitie and seeketh to haue all the complements of diuine honour applyed to his seruice, so hath he among the rest possessed also most poets with his idle fancies.

<sup>24</sup> *Cambridge History of English Literature*, IV, 128.

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For in lieu of solemne and deuout matter, to which in duety they owe their abilities, they now busie themselves in expressing such passions as onely serue for testimonies to what unworthy affections they haue wedded their wills. And because the best course to let them see the errour of their works is to weaue a new webbe in their own loome. I have heere laide a few course threds together to inuite some skilfuller wits to goe forward in the same or to begin some finer peece; wherein it may be seene how well verse and vertue sute together.”<sup>25</sup>

These words are unmistakably clear as to Southwell's purpose in writing poetry. They, likewise, give us a clue to the meaning of his poems and help us to a proper appreciation of him as a poet. His work has been highly commended from the beginning, James Russell Lowell standing almost alone in his pronouncement that “St. Peter's Complaint” is a “drawl of thirty pages of maudlin repentance.” Grosart considered this estimate a hasty misjudgment on the part of Lowell and suggested a re-perusal from behind the “Study Windows.”

“St. Peter's Complaint,” the longest and best-known of Southwell's works though by no means the best, was, within six years, imitated by at least ten English poets. In less than forty years, there were fifteen editions of this poem, two appearing in London in 1595, the year of his martyrdom, one published by Wolfe and the other by Cawood. Of the two editions, Cawood's is the better, Wolfe's having sixteen stanzas out of their proper order. Other editions soon followed, one appearing in 1597 another in 1599, and still another in 1602. We do not, however, estimate his popular appeal solely on the printed editions, be-

<sup>25</sup> Grosart, “The Author to His Louing Cosin,” p. 4.

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cause as has been previously pointed out, literature of all kinds circulated in manuscript copies and "St. Peter's Complaint" was no exception. An extract from the examination of one John Bolt summoned to account for the books of papistry found in his possession, proves that "St. Peter's Complaint" was well-known before it reached print. The case of Bolt, incidentally, gives added weight to what we are practically certain of, that at least a portion of this poem must have been completed before Southwell's arrest in 1592.

The examination of Bolt <sup>26</sup> in March, 1594 N.S., more than a year before any of Southwell's poems were printed, states:

"And (this examine) saith that the one book bound in parchment beginning with a piece of Scripture, viz., 'There is no other name under heaven,' etc. (i.e. the Jesus Psalter) is his book and of his writing. And also one little book written called 'St. Peter's Complaint' is his but of whose writing he knoweth not, but borrowed it of Mr. Wiseman. Being showed one paper book which was read to him, after he had seen the same, saith that the same little paper book which was found in his cloak-bag containing about a dozen leaves of paper containing matter of Campion, whereof two written and the other six unwritten, is his and that he wrote the same with his own hand and copied it forth out of another written book which he borrowed of one Henry Souche . . . and that he hath had the same book these five or six years, but did not deliver any copies out thereof to anybody." <sup>27</sup>

"St. Peter's Complaint" consists of one hundred and thirty-

<sup>26</sup> Bolt had been at court, was converted to the Old Faith and retired to St. Omer where he became a priest. Hood, *op. cit.*, I f. n., p. 72.

<sup>27</sup> Thurston, *The Month*, March, 1895, p. 388.

two stanzas though the Stonyhurst MS, and the Harleian MS 6921 of the British Museum contain only twelve stanzas of the entire poem. Apparently, then, it was completed some time after it was begun and was extended far beyond the poet's original plan. The theme is the remorse of the Prince of the Apostles for his denial of his Divine Master. In reality it is a succession of separate studies on the sad fall of St. Peter, rather than a single rounded-out poem. Had it ever been divided into a number of short pieces with separate headings, a better effect would have resulted. Southwell's profuse imagery expressed in simple language, enriched and made quaint by the use, now and again, of archaic words, amply testifies to the facility of his pen. Throughout the poem may be heard "the solemn chant of the saint's sorrow" which, at times, rises to an emotional pitch of heartfelt grief. The poem is no mere expansion of a fanciful idea but the outburst of a genuine sorrow that springs from a divine love. Southwell expresses no sympathy for the human weakness of St. Peter whose fall was the natural act of his impulsive character. Had Southwell dwelt on this aspect of the sin, the poem would have an appeal for the modern reader; as it is, he lets the magnitude of the Saint's fall overshadow every other consideration. He heaps metaphor upon metaphor, giving free rein to his own thoughts and emotions which he gracefully expresses in striking phrases.

It has been remarked by Professor Hales that "St. Peter's Complaint" bears a strong resemblance to Shakespeare's "Lucrece" in its overpowering wealth of imagery, its luxuriance of thought and its minuteness of narration,<sup>28</sup> but the resemblance

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Humphrey Ward, *The English Poets*, I, 481.



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ends here, for "St. Peter's Complaint" expresses an emotion incalculably loftier than that found in "Lucrece." Southwell's poem is "the work of a mind often embarrassed by its own riches which it expends with a prodigal carelessness."

The prodigality of expression has been, from time to time, criticised for its effusiveness. The unprejudiced reader will find in this poem genuine emotion without any attempt at wit for wit's sake. One of the earliest to call attention to "St. Peter's Complaint," and "Mary Magdalen's Funeral Tears," was Bishop Hall.<sup>29</sup> Many of Hall's poems were directed against the poetical taste of the day and in the following stanza which attacks the sacred poems of the period, he refers to Southwell's works thus:

Hence ye profane: mell not with holy things,  
That Sion's Muse from Palestina brings.  
Parnassus is transformed to Sion hill,  
And Jewry palms her steep ascents doon fill.  
Now good St. Peter weeps pure Helicon,  
And both the Maries make a music moan.<sup>30</sup>  
Yea, and the prophet of the heavenly lyre,  
Great Solomon, sings in the English quire;  
And is become a new-found sonnetist,  
Singing his love, the holy spouse of Christ;<sup>31</sup>  
Like as she were some light-skirts of the rest,  
In mightiest ink-hornisms he can thither wrest.  
Ye Sion Muses, shall by my dear will,  
For this your zeal and far-admired skill,

<sup>29</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, LXVIII (November, 1789).

<sup>30</sup> Allusion to Southwell's poems.

<sup>31</sup> Allusion to Drayton's "Harmonic of the Church."

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Be straight transported from Jerusalem,  
Unto the holy house of Bethlehem.

Marston, Hall's enemy, retorted in the following lines entitled "Reactio" hoping thereby to nullify his antagonist's criticism:

Come dance yee stumbling Satyres, by his side,  
If he list, once the Syon muse deride,  
Ye Granta's white nymphs, come and with you bring  
Some Sillabub, whilst he doth sweetly sing  
'Gainst Peter's Teares and Marie's mouing moane,  
And like a fierce enraged boare doth foame  
At Sacred Sonnets.

Interesting as the poem is for its own sake and for the influence it had on the contemporary "Plaints" and "Laments" that became so popular during the last years of Elizabeth's reign, there is an added interest in learning that Southwell was himself an imitator of the Italian poets Luigi Tansillo and Erasmo Valvasone, both of whom Southwell must have read during his residence in Italy.<sup>32</sup> Tansillo, particularly, had aroused considerable interest in his writings. A poem written by Tansillo on the same subject, St. Peter's sin, appeared posthumously in Rome in the very year that Southwell was made Prefect of Studies in the English College. As early as 1550, Tansillo had written on the "Lagrima di S. Pietro" and the stanzas were published and copied by the French and Spanish. Tansillo's poem was the model for Robert Estienne in "Les Larmes de Saint Pierre et autres vers Chrétiens sur la Passion" and also for the

<sup>32</sup> Thurston, *The Month*, CVI, 319.

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great Malherbe who in his title acknowledges his indebtedness to Tansillo's poem, "The Tears of St. Peter, after Tansillo to King Henry III, 1587." In Spanish, the Italian poem was copied by Luys Galves de Montalvo but a comparison of passages, bearing striking resemblances to the Italian poet's work, reveals that the French and Spanish poems are merely translations, whereas the English poet borrows the general concepts of his model, but presents an original treatment. No passage illustrates this point any better than that addressed to the sacred eyes of Christ. Tansillo compresses into one stanza two ideas respecting the eyes of our Saviour. First, they are mirrors in which the Apostle sees his fault and secondly, they cast a glance upon poor St. Peter and thereby teach him more than he could learn in a hundred years. Southwell employs both ideas but develops them in a manner that shows he worked in a spirit of absolute freedom and never with the Italian poem before him. His debt, therefore, to Tansillo was no more than that of reading the Italian's poem and finding a theme which appealed to his poetic fancy, but which he handled entirely independent of his source as may be seen:

Giovane donna il suo bel volto in specchio  
Non vide mai di lucido cristallo  
Come in quel punto il miserabel vecchio  
Negli occhi del Signor vide il suo fallo:  
Ne tante cose udir cupido orecchio  
Potria, se stesse ben senza intervello.

The translation follows:

"A young woman never saw her beautiful face in a mirror of lucid crystal as clearly as the poor old man (St. Peter) then saw his sin in the eyes of the Lord.

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"Nor could an attentive ear, were it to remain intent upon another's conversation for a hundred years and a hundred without interruption, gather as much as he then did with a glance."

The Spanish version, as the French, is unmistakably a rendering of Tansillo's work:

"No ve su rostro mejor  
en el cristalino espejo  
la donzella, que su error  
vido el miserable viejo  
en los ojos des Señor  
Ne oydo jamas atento  
pudiera oyr ni escuchar  
tanto en diez annos ni en ciento  
quanto con solo mirar  
oyo Pedro aquel momento."

"A maiden cannot see her face more clearly in the crystal glass than the unhappy old man saw in the eyes of the Master, his mistake. No ear ever attentive could ever hear or listen to as much in ten nor in one hundred years as with only one look, Peter listened to in that moment."

Southwell, on the other hand, expands these same ideas into two stanzas, a comparison of which with Tansillo's gives an idea of how far he departed from his predecessor:

O living mirrors seeing whom you show,  
Which equal shadows worths with shadowed things,  
Yea! make things nobler than in native hue,  
By being shaped in those life-giving springs;  
Much more my image in those eyes was graced,  
Than in myself whom sin and shame defaced.

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O eyes! whose glances are a silent speech  
In ciphered works high mysteries disclosing;  
Which, with a look, all sciences can teach,  
Whose text, to faithful hearts need little glosing;  
Witness unworthy I, who in a look  
Learned more by rote, than all the scribes by book.

Southwell's poem shows the resourcefulness of the artist as well as his facility in the use of language. There are very obvious faults in "St. Peter's Complaint," but at the same time, the poem exhibits the genius of its author. The metre employed is one that is admirably adapted for narration and exposition, yet, here it is made suitable for lyric flights of emotion. Notwithstanding the many merits of the poem, there is a certain monotony, the result of measured pauses, every line being almost a sentence. After we have finished criticising adversely "St. Peter's Complaint," we are compelled, nevertheless, to acknowledge that it possesses the fundamental qualities of great poetry.

In 1606, eleven years after Southwell's death, a poem entitled "A Foure-fould Meditation of the foure last things" was published. The poem, as the title indicates, dwells on subjects that must have occupied the poet's mind not only during his imprisonment, but during the period of his missionary activity. "A Foure-fould Meditation" is not included in Grosart's edition but was published by Edmonds in his "Isham Reprints" (1895).

Father Thurston maintains, that this poem does not belong to Southwell<sup>33</sup> but to his friend and fellow-prisoner, Philip, Earl of Arundel. There are 126 stanzas divided into four parts treating in turn "Of the houre of Death," "Of the day of

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, January, 1896.

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Judgement," "Of the paines of Hell," and "Of the ioyes of Heaven." The poem voices all the emotions that characterize the other works of Southwell, his excessive sadness when treating of man's progress through this world, as well as his rapturous joy at the thought of the happiness of heaven. Of this latter theme, which is the closing section of the poem, there is a "power of sustained lyric exaltation which has all of Crashaw's force with more than Crashaw's restraint."<sup>34</sup>

The subjects discussed are commonplace topics, but notwithstanding Father Thurston's criticism, that the poems "On Death and Judgment are far too dreary for the refined taste of Father Southwell," the thoughts seem to the present writer to be expressed with a vividness, originality, and intellectual force that bear strong resemblance to Southwell's poetry. "A Foure-fould Meditation," written in six-line stanzas of decasyllabic verse, shows the author's limitation as a metrist, but in this poem as in all the others ascribed to Southwell, there is a dignity, which to understand, must be studied in the light of his life.

When Charles Edmonds attempted to piece-out "A Foure-fould Meditation," he sent a letter to the *Athenaeum* which, from its high character, he deemed most likely to effect his object.<sup>35</sup> In reply, he received a letter from Samuel Sole of St. Mary's College, Oscott, asking if the poem whose missing portion he sought began with the lines:

O wretched man which lovest earthlie thinges  
And to this worlde hast made thyself a thrall

<sup>34</sup> *Cambridge History of English Literature*, III, 150.

<sup>35</sup> "A Foure-fould Meditation," p. viii.



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The letter stated that the college possessed a manuscript poem which turned out to be the one Edmonds sought. Father Samuel Sole became immediately interested and through the president of the college, procured for Edmonds the desired poem. Edmonds, however, followed the Rawlinson Collection in the Bodleian rather than the Oscott MS because the former contains 126 stanzas, the latter, 118, the additional ones being numbers 42 and 63 to 69.

Later Father Sole published in *The Tablet* (London) February 22nd, 1896, a hymn under the title "Christo Crucifixo." Though the poem is signed S. W., Father Sole felt reasonably sure he had unearthed another piece of the Jesuit poet. An interesting discussion ensued in the pages of *The Tablet* as to the probability of Southwell's authorship, and Father Sole evidently convinced many that the poem is Southwell's. The following are the stanzas he discovered in a manuscript collection of Oscott College, and they certainly resemble Southwell in "the tone, rhythm, and soul of the lines":<sup>36</sup>

O cruel death, O wounds most deep,  
O guiltless blood, O bitter pain,  
Alas! who can forbear to weep  
To see God's son so cruel slain.

O nails most great, O cross most high,  
O thorns most sharp, O pierced brain,  
Alas! sweet God what heart have I  
That is not rent to see thy pain.

O dimmed eyes, O wounded head,  
O face deformed with black and blue,

<sup>36</sup> *The Tablet*, LV, 284.

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O Lord of life, how art Thou dead,  
How hast thou lost Thy heavenly hue?

O angels, look! is this your king!  
O Queen of heaven, is this your child!  
Is this the maker of each thing!  
Alas! who hath Him thus defiled?

O God most good, who hath Thee so  
Imbrued with blood, so rent and torn,  
Who is the cause of all Thy woe,  
Sweet God, how art Thou thus forlorn?

Ah! I, 'twas I, 'twas I, alas!  
That made these wounds so deep and wide,  
For me he hangs upon the cross  
For me, vile slave, my Lord thus died.

My pride of heart hath pierced His brain  
My garments gay have stripped Him so,  
My envy opened all His veins,  
My sins, alas! did Him this woe.

My sin by justice did deserve  
Eternal death and endless pain,  
But yet the judge, me to preserve,  
Thus cruelly Himself was slain.

What friend hath ever for his friend  
Abiden half that pain and woe  
That Thou, my Lord and love most kind  
Hast done for me Thy cruel foe?

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Ah! God how hard a heart have I,  
That is not broken yet in twain!  
Alas! mine eyes, how are ye dry?  
O tears, gush out; gush out amain.

Can ye behold this bitter smart  
And see these streams of blood that fall  
From head, from feet, from hands and heart,  
And yet not weep, what, not at all?

My God, most good removed from me  
This heart so void of all remorse,  
Make me at least to mourn with Thee,  
Or else of life deprive my corse.

O Saviour sweet, hear my request,  
Make me partaker of Thy pain,  
In solace let me never rest,  
Since thou in sorrow doest remain.

And if it be Thy glorious will  
That I shall taste of this Thy cup,  
Lo! here Thy pleasure to fulfill  
Myself I wholly offer up.

If Southwell wrote these lines, the last two stanzas are especially significant as a foreshadowing of his imprisonment and death. Although directness, beauty, and simplicity as well as a sincere and unrepining sadness characterize this poem and are powerful arguments for definitely assigning it to Robert Southwell, nevertheless, "Christo Crucifixo" does not seem to me quite up to the level of Father Southwell's other poems.

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His true poetic power displays itself in his shorter poems which have a vitality and strength of expression despite "the quaint and affected-seeming verse" in which they are written. His lyrics deal exclusively with God and things divine, themes which may restrain his muse but which do not silence her. Had Southwell directed his aims differently, perhaps he might have written poems "that would move the hearts of all the ages to come; but to him as priest and poet, fame meant nothing."

Grosart arranged his shorter poems in three groups, the first of which he called "Myrtæ," the second, Southwell himself had named "Maoniae," and the third, "Melofolia." The first series, "Myrtæ," was added to "St. Peter's Complaint" in 1595, and this collection treats of the emptiness of the world and of earthly love. Father Southwell is one of the very few genuine poets who never felt the touch of earthly love or "of that sentiment half-human, half-divine, that we call love. Even Crashaw's address to his mythical mistress, impersonal as it is, expresses a feeling that Southwell, it appears, never experienced." In "Love's Servile Lot" he shows that Love, the "mistress of many minds," has no attraction for him:

She letteth fall some luring baits,  
For fools to gather up;  
To sweet, to sour, to every taste  
She tempereth her cup.

This attitude might be anticipated as that which Southwell would take toward earthly love, yet were this the normal one of England's poets, what a loss her literature would have sustained! His estimate of life which appears in "St. Peter's Complaint,"

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Ah! life, sweet drop, drown'd in a sea of sours,  
A flying good, posting to doubtful end;  
Still losing months and years to gain new hours,  
Fain times to have and spare, yet forced to spend;  
Thy growth, decrease; a moment all thou hast,  
That gone ere known; the rest to come or past.

Ah! life the maze of countless straying ways  
Open to erring steps and strew'd with baits,  
To bind weak senses into endless strays,  
Aloof from virtue's rough unbeaten straits  
A flower, a play, a blast, a shade, a dream,  
A living death, a never-turning stream.

we find expressed again and again in his shorter poems. In "Life is But Loss" he says:

Life is a wandering course to doubtful rest;  
As oft a cursed rise to damning leap,  
As happy race to win a heavenly crest;  
None being sure what final fruits to reap:  
And who can like in such a life to dwell,  
Whose ways are strict to heaven, but wide to hell?

In this same group of poems he bewails the weight of sin in "David's Peccavi," "Sin's Heavy Load," "The Prodigal Child's Soul Wrack" and "St. Peter's Remorse"; and the joys awaiting us in our true home, a "world whose joys are past decay" in "Look Home" and "At Home in Heaven."

Every true lover of poetry will find in these shorter lyrics a warmth of feeling and much to delight a cultivated imagination. Moreover, many of them arouse an interest and create a

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desire to look more closely into his philosophy of life. He expresses in no uncertain terms a hatred for vice, and in his denunciation of worldly pleasures, at times, appears almost puritanical. From the stern and severe aspects of puritanism however, he is saved by his religious fervor which can be felt in the coldest of his poems. While the shadow of death seems to hover about Southwell's poetry, on the whole, his writings possess spontaneity and delicacy of finish. Sir Edgerton Bridges remarked, "A deep pathos illumined by a deep piety marked everything Southwell wrote." This comment has a particular application to the poems that rose like a moan from his anguished human heart, because he was human, and therefore he felt keenly the pangs of bodily suffering. He accepted his imprisonment cheerfully, but his sensitive nature suffered more than can be realized from his poetry. The poems call forth our wonder when we remember that the sweetest, most beautiful and most moving, were written in prison with fingers bent, swollen, and smarting from the torture of the rack. He gives a vivid and touching portrayal of his sufferings, mental and physical in the poem, "I Die Alive":

I live but such a life as ever dies,  
I die, but such a death as never ends;  
My death to end my dying life denies,  
And life my loving death no whit amends.

Of a naturally genial and sociable disposition, Southwell could not help feeling the restraint of prison life, but he shows no repining for his unhappy situation. His poems, without exception, are marked by a spirit of resignation which must not be



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looked upon as weakness, for weakness is not characteristic of a man who, from a dungeon of torture, could sing songs that bespeak great courage and high ideals. Typical of his poems are the lines which tell of his ardent longings for a release from life:

Not where I breathe, but where I love, I live,  
Not where I love but where I am, I die,  
The life I wish must future glory give,  
The death I feel in present dangers lie.

Not only languishing in prison, but even living in the world, Southwell looked upon as a captivity from which he desired to be freed. This earthly sojourn was a stepping stone to enable him attain the joys of his heavenly home.

In the best-known of his lyrics, there are wholesome lessons directing his fellow Catholics "to break through the veils of earth and contemplate the reward of labors and sufferings patiently borne." In "Times Go by Turns" he presents his idea, didactic as it is, so attractively that the lines could not fail to produce fruit:

Not always fall of leaf nor ever spring,  
No endless night, yet not eternall day;  
The saddest birds a seison find to sing,  
The roughest storm a calm may soon allay;  
Thus with succeeding turns God tempereth all  
That men may hope to rise, yet fear to fall.

In the poem "Content and Ritche" he has used a theme that had appealed to countless other poets, pagan and Christian. Seneca wrote the famous line:

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Mens regnum bona possidet

which idea appears in Sir Edward Dyer's famous poem beginning:

My mind to me a kingdom is,  
Such present joy therein I find,  
As far exceeds all earthly bliss  
That God and Nature hath assigned,  
Though much I want that most would have,  
Yet still my mind forbids to crave.<sup>37</sup>

Southwell takes up the same idea but expresses it in his own peculiar style:

I feel no care of coyne,  
Well-doing is my wealth,  
My mynd to me an empire is,  
While grace affordeth health.

"Love's Servile Lot" and "Lewd Love is Loss" deal with similar themes and have the same morality of purpose, which, however, does not obscure the beauty of the poems. Characteristically, he turned Sir Edward Dyer's "Phansie" into a "Sinner's Complaint," with a very effective result. Dyer was one of the fashionable writers of the time, whose work, unlike Southwell's, soon fell into obscurity. The charm of these beautiful poems gives some idea of the lyric heights Southwell might have reached had not torture and imprisonment changed him into a singer of songs "which tell of saddest thought."

<sup>37</sup> Ward, *op. cit.*, I, 377.

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One of the most charming of his shorter poems is "A Child My Choice," a tender and fervent address to the Child Jesus. It exemplifies that the poet can keep uppermost in our minds the thought of the poem rather than the expression, fantastic as this sometimes is. Side by side with this poem must be placed "The Burning Babe," the most masterful of Southwell's lyrics, a poem which gives its author literary distinction. "The Burning Babe" is the Infant Saviour of whom he fittingly writes with great simplicity yet with elegance of thought. On this piece, Ben Jonson bestowed enthusiastic praise. William Drummond of Hawthornden in Scotland, a poet himself and a recorder of conversations with rare Ben, summarizes Jonson's opinion of Robert Southwell as follows: "That Southwell was hanged; yet so he (Jonson) had written that piece of his the 'Burning Babe,' he would be content to destroy many of his."<sup>38</sup> What delicacy of imagination and religious fervor are contained in lines like these which he puts into the mouth of the Babe of Divine Love:

My faultless breast the furnace is, the  
fuel wounding thorns,  
Love is the fire and sighs the smoke,  
the ashes shame and scorns;  
The fuel Justice layeth on, and Mercy blows  
the coals;  
The metal in this furnace wrought are  
men's defiled souls;

<sup>38</sup> Some doubt as to the authenticity of Drummond's conversations has been raised by C. L. Stainer in his work, *The Conversations of Jonson and Drummond*.

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For which as now on fire I am, to work  
    them to their good,  
So well I melt into a bath, to wash them  
    in my blood;  
With this He vanished out of sight, and  
    swiftly shrunk away,  
And straight I called unto mind that it  
    was Christmas Day.

In this connection, it is interesting to remember that Southwell was the first poet to sing with real power of a child.

The remaining poems of this group are perhaps not quite as interesting as those quoted, but they all possess sincerity, deep feeling, and tender simplicity and have, therefore, greater claim to endurance than poems that are better known, since their content contains truth not for a class, but for the human race.

"Maeoniae" bears the same date as the "Myrtae" series, namely, 1595. The poems of this division are the least known. They treat, for the most part, of the life of Our Lord, and His holy Mother. Grosart says, he arranged them in his collection as they stand in the 1596 edition, "save that under 'Maeoniae' will be found certain poems that belong to this division rather than to the other."<sup>39</sup> The order of poems would seem to indicate that the poet was influenced by the hymns and liturgy of the Church. His breviary, which by virtue of his priesthood, he was obliged to read every day, no doubt, suggested to his mind some thoughts for these poems. There can be no doubt that Southwell said the Divine Office with great devotion and meditated upon the mysteries there commemorated. If he was inspired by

<sup>39</sup> Grosart, Note in preface to "Maeoniae," Fuller Worthies Library.

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the hymns and prayers prescribed by the Church for the various seasons, there is no attempt on his part to follow the ecclesiastical year closely, either in the manner of George Herbert in "The Temple"<sup>40</sup> or that of John Keble in "The Christian Year."<sup>41</sup> He found poetic possibilities in the liturgy and drew poetic inspiration from the round of daily worship. In one of the liturgical hymns can be traced the source for his poem, "Our Ladie's Salutation." In the Latin hymn occurs this idea:

Sumens illud Ave  
Gabrielis ore,  
Funda nos in pace,  
Mutans Hevae nomen.

Taking that sweet Ave  
Erst, by Gabriel spoken,  
Eva's name reversing,  
Be of peace the token.<sup>42</sup>

which Southwell presents thus:

Spell Eva backe and Ave yowe finde  
The first beganne, the last reversed our harmes,  
An angell's witching wordes did Eva blynde,  
An angell's Ave disinchautes the charmes.

Similar resemblances can be traced to other prayers, hymns, and litanies of the Church, and it requires no stretch of our imagi-

<sup>40</sup> George Herbert, *The Temple*, a series of one hundred fifty poems suggested by the Church, her holidays and ceremonials.

<sup>41</sup> John Keble, *The Christian Year*, a volume of religious verse for which the author is especially remembered in a literary way.

<sup>42</sup> Matthew Britt, *The Hymns of the Breviary and Missal*, p. 317.

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nation to see that these would naturally be reflected in his writing. For example, we can trace the influence of the "Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary" in the daring imagery of many of his poems.

The "Lauda Sion Salvatorem," which is a faithful translation of the hymn composed by St. Thomas Aquinas at the request of Pope Urban IV, on the occasion of the institution of the Feast of Corpus Christi 1264, and which is in itself a condensed compendium of exact theology, is an admirable English poem. Throughout, there is a spirit of deep reverence and profound piety which proceeds from the poet's own attitude for the subject of his poem. Not only was the beauty of the Roman liturgy an inspiration to him, but his frequent allusions to Biblical characters and his ability to draw parallels between incidents in the Old Testament and his own day gives an insight into his reading. It will be remembered that the Bible was one of the books he asked for during his imprisonment, and the frequent references found in his works testify to the good use he made of it. Toward the end of this series of poems he again turns to the theme of death in "The Image of Death," "The Vale of Tears," and "Man's Civil War," after which in another poem, "Seek Flowers of Heaven," he exclaims:

Soar up, my soul, unto thy rest,  
Cast off this loathsome load;  
Long is the date of thy exile,  
Too long thy strait abode.

It is characteristic of Southwell, no matter how serious and sad the subject, to end on a high note.



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In the third series, "Melofolia," the most outstanding pieces are "Decease, Release" and "Laments for a Noble Lady," the one written upon the death of Mary, Queen of Scots, and the other upon the death of Lady Margaret Sackville, half-sister to Philip, Earl of Arundel. May we not conclude from the fact of Southwell's having written a poem upon the death of the Scottish Queen, that apart from the interest Mary might inspire in a poet, he, like his fellow Catholics, had centered his hopes upon Mary's accession to the throne of England? There is no trace of any such hope in the poem, but Southwell as a man would naturally desire to see a sovereign in England who would advance the cause for which he was ready to lay down his life. The poem expresses his complete sympathy with the cause of Mary. His constant theme of scorn for earthly honor is expressed and he feels that she lost nothing by death; rather she gained, and he has her say to posterity:

Rue not my death, rejoyce at my repose;  
It was no death to me, but to my woe;  
The budd was opened to lett out the rose  
The cheynes unloos'd to let the captive goe.

"Laments for a Noble Lady" appeared originally at the close of Southwell's prose treatise, "The Triumphs over Death," and is a beautiful tribute to Lady Margaret's virtues. His vivid portrait reveals the lovely character of his holy penitent and the sincere regard which he had for her. His verses were not idle compliments but a deep veneration which we may find in these glowing terms:

Death aymed too highe, he hitt too choise a wighte,  
Renownde for birth, for life, for lovely partes;

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He kilde her cares, he brought her worthes to light,  
He robd our eyes, but hath enriched our hartes:  
He lett out of the arke a Noe's dove,  
But many hartes are arkes unto her loue.

Grace, Nature, Fortune, did in her conspire  
To shewe a prooffe of their united skill:  
Slye Fortune, ever false, did soone retyre,  
But double grace supplid false Fortune's ill:  
And though she wrought not to her Fortune's pitch,  
In Grace and nature fewe were founde so ritche.

Heaven of this heavenly *perle* is now possesst,  
Whose lustre, was the blaze of Honnor's lighte;  
Whose substance pure, of every good the best,  
Whose price, the crowne of Vertue's highest right;  
Whose praise, to be her self; whose greatest blisse,  
To live, to love, to be where nowe she is.

The other poems of this collection are: "Of the Blessed Sacrament of the Aulter," "Short Rules of a Good Life," "A Preparatory Prayer," "The Effects of Prayer," and "Ensamples of our Saviour."

In addition to these three groups in the complete edition of Southwell's poetry are the Latin Poems, seven in number, the longest and most interesting being "De Assumptione" which has 219 lines. These poems, which show some influence of Virgil, may have been written during his time of study since it is a custom among the Jesuit scholastics to write Latin poems twice a year for the semi-annual renovation of vows. The best writers contribute something for the celebration of the patronal feasts

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of the students of theology and philosophy.<sup>43</sup> In the technique of Latin poetry, he probably does not rise above many another Jesuit scholastic, but the underlying thoughts are interesting because they are typically like Southwell, the poet. His Latin poems never claimed any particular attention and possibly would never have been heard of, had it not been for the poems written in his native tongue. A free translation of one of the shortest of the Latin poems, "In Renovationem Votorum, Festis Natalis Domini," will convey some idea of the character of these poems and at the same time bear evidence to the fact that "the style is the man":

Life draws near you: draw you near to life  
With pledged allegiance; it shall meet those vows;  
Life offers you itself impartially,  
And you by taking life in your soul's house,  
Shall have continuous life throughout your days,  
And yet, what better could you give it then,  
Than vows fast-sealed to God Who is our all—  
Life, Light, Existence? Give no trust to men,  
But vow all to the ever-living God,  
Your soul make His perpetual spouse,  
And everlasting life He shall repay  
Immeasurably the measure of your vows.

The Latin elegies are incomplete and the ninth in which "the spirit of a Queen (Mary, Queen of Scots) solemnly teaches noble-men what to think of the fleeting things of earth is a "mere fragment too small to enable us to see more than the author's purpose." <sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> *American Catholic Quarterly Review*, VII, 453.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 454.

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Such were the works which have given Robert Southwell, priest and poet, a lasting place in the history of England's literature. His poetry is full of "cryptic devices, and mysterious allegories, fables with pointed meanings, anagrams, rebuses, far-fetched conceits"; and no adequate discussion of his writings could overlook these characteristics which contribute to his quaintness and charm.

The qualities inherent in his poetry give him a place among the writers of the great Elizabethan Age. His faults of style do not entirely obscure the warmth and fancy of his creative imagination. In some of the shorter lyrics he rises to heights of emotion combining universality of feeling with unity of form. "The success," says Professor Schelling, "of a lyric poem will depend on the poet's ability to exalt his mood to an independence of the ordinary considerations of time and place, and upon his fortunate treatment of the conditions of his theme in fitting and musical form."<sup>45</sup> To Father Southwell, it will be conceded by appreciative readers that he meets these requirements in a sufficient number of poems to merit the title of genuine poet, typical of the age in which he lived.

Among the Elizabethans there had been a rapid and diverse development of the lyric especially in the latter half of the sixteenth century. The lyric had its origin in Italian culture, which had influenced the literature of England since the days when Chaucer, upon his return from an Italian mission, put into English verse some of the fire of the Italian Renaissance. For over a century and a half after Chaucer's death, there was no great English poet, but Englishmen never lost interest in Italy. In

<sup>45</sup> Felix E. Schelling, *Elizabethan Lyrics*, p. vii.

Elizabeth's day no one who made any pretense to culture could afford to be ignorant of the Italian language and literature.

The impetus to the lyrical outburst for which the latter part of Elizabeth's reign was so remarkable, dates back to 1557 when there appeared that epoch-making book, "Tottel's Miscellany," more properly called, "Songs and Sonnets written by the Right Honorable Lord Henry Howard, late of Surrey, and other." The publication of this work proclaimed the dawn of another period. It was "the treasury into which was garnered the earliest lyrical harvest in England." In the years that followed the publication of this work, poets continued to write until England became indeed, "a nest of singing birds." English scholars and courtiers brought the lyric back to their native land, and it was among them that it flourished. They combined in it qualities derived from their study of the classics, and from their interest in Continental poetry, a poetry needed to stimulate and gladden English song; above all, they infused into their poems a genuine English feeling and manner of thought. All this gave an impulse of golden life to English poetry, and in the hands of Elizabethan poets the impulse quickened for they gathered together the freshness of Chaucer, the dignity of Virgil, and the elaborate color of Petrarch and Ariosto and blended them into a poetic language that was noble, firm, and musical.

Once the lyric became established in England, it proceeded through a series of poetical fashions, because the writers composed them for their own delectation and for that of their friends and not for the general public. Every educated man made poems, which if approved, were copied out by his friends and circulated in manuscript or included in song books.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the match-

<sup>46</sup> *Cambridge History of English Literature*, III, 187.

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less gift of song given the Elizabethans, was not confined to one class; and men as opposite in life and thought as the saintly priest, Father Southwell, and the atheist Marlowe, wrote poetry.<sup>47</sup> Southwell dealt chiefly with theological subjects which are apt to restrict the Muse so that she may not forget men's souls while plucking flowers for the sake of their perfume.<sup>48</sup> Writing at a time when our language was striving to accommodate itself to new conditions, Southwell, sensitive to the tendencies of his age, and working under its influence, clothes his thoughts in all the artificial refinements that were agreeable to the taste of the day. Much that he wrote calls to mind that style of architecture which is termed the baroque. His poems are over-decorated with metaphors and conceits, as the artificial bits of verbal cleverness were called. In this aspect of Southwell's poetry, he was simply reflecting a fashion of verse-writing that had been long in vogue in England, though best exemplified in the Italian poet, Marino. Perhaps Southwell was not influenced by Marino and the other Italian poets, any more than many lyrists of his day, but it is not unreasonable to feel he had read more Italian poetry than some of his contemporaries by reason of his long residence in Italy. One admirer of Southwell feels that while there he possibly saw a picture of some Italian Renaissance painter that later, as he lay in the Tower, became the inspiration for "The Burning Babe." There is no question of his not being affected to some extent by the Italian culture any more than we can say he was not influenced by his fellow poets in England. Of these last, he probably owes most to Sir Philip

<sup>47</sup> Schelling, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>48</sup> *Catholic World*, XXXII (1880), 126.



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Sidney, so aptly called "the last knight of English chivalry."

The striking resemblance in the style of Sir Philip Sidney and Father Southwell—two men whose life-journey carried them over such widely different roads—leads one to conclude that Southwell, like many others in his day, had succumbed to the charm of Sidney's poetry. It could hardly be otherwise; for Southwell, endowed as he was with the true lyric gift, could not fail to appreciate the poetry of his own countryman who was so profoundly touched by lyric emotion and so capable of producing rare poetic effects. Southwell's own words to his "loving cousin" attest to his interest in English poetry, not only in its style, but also in its subject matter. When he said that he intended "to weave a new web in their own loom," he meant he would present themes different from those ordinarily used by the poets, but he would clothe them in a familiar guise. Southwell's poetry, after the manner of Sidney's, is of imagination all compact; both struck the note of an intense and personal poetry. The throbbing and burning life of Sidney's style must have contributed something to the glow that characterizes much that Southwell wrote. Sidney was not an enemy of the minor and more formal graces of style; his vocabulary was neither "Latinized or Italianized nor Lylyfied." He does shown an inclination to excess of ornament depending on his free use of "conceits, pregnant apophthegms, which gleam like jewels of thought, and beauty of phrase derived from the arrangement and cadence of his verse." Since there is a marked resemblance in the features that characterize the poetry of Sidney and Southwell, it can be no idle fancy or unreasonable assumption to say that Sidney's influence is quite apparent in the writings of the later poet. In this connection it is interesting to remember that

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neither poet gave himself up entirely to the poetic muse. Sidney's life was varied and colorful, and his prime motive for writing was to indulge his fancy in ideal scenes and sentiments. To Southwell, as was stated before, literature was but a side issue; he used his talents not to acquire worldly glory, but to show his fellowmen the shallowness and transiency of earthly glory. For this reason, the range of his poetry is far more limited than Sidney's. With different motives animating him, "greater ease and freedom of life, less painful moments for his compositions, and supervision of their publication," Southwell could have enriched and varied the themes of his songs and extended his fame as a poet. As it is, he is acclaimed the best poet of sacred verse in the golden age of Elizabeth, "the founder of the modern English style of religious poetry," his influence and example being evident in the work of Crashaw, or of Donne, or of Herbert or Waller, or any of those whose devout lyrics were admired in later times.<sup>49</sup>

Let us return to the consideration of the themes that occupied Southwell's attention. He tried to express in poetry truths that in nature are paradoxical because derived from theological study and formulated by the Church in creeds and articles of Faith.<sup>50</sup> For instance, in his translation of the "Lauda Sion," he really put into English verse the doctrine of the Holy Eucharist. In many of his other poems, not translations, he attempted to write of the mysteries of his religion, subjects infinite in themselves, in a language that could reach the finite intelligence. Naturally, to effect the desired result, he needed to employ his ingenuity. Moreover, the intensity of his own spiritual nature as well as

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Arnold, *A Manual of English Literature*, p. 84.

<sup>50</sup> William J. Courthope, *History of English Poetry*, III, 119.

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meditation on the mysteries of the life of Christ and His Mother as found in the "Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius" must have helped to inflame the fire of religious devotion that burned steadily in his soul. Expression of this religious fervor could easily lead him to extravagances that are intelligible to members of his faith, but must sound strained to those unaccustomed to the ritual of the Church. There is a tendency among writers like Southwell, to deck out their thought in striking and unusual figures of speech and illustration, and this is partly the result of the elaborate ceremonies which attend their religious practices. The profusion of imagery which comes from the glow of his own personal devotion frequently leads him to such excess, that he appears consciously to search out novel or striking modes of expression. Thus he sometimes obscures the beauty of thought in order to present to the reader a series of strained conceptions and allusions, which seem mere rhetorical devices used for their own sake. If Southwell sinned in this respect, he was not the only offender; for neither his subject matter nor the warmth out of which he wrote, was entirely responsible for his employment of the "conceit" as the affected imagery of this age is styled. Elaborate, rhetorical qualities characterized the writings of all the Elizabethan poets, and in Southwell they appear in abundance, namely, in the use of paradox, hyperbole, antithesis, and excess of metaphor. While it has been suggested that Southwell's habit of thought, his way of looking at things, and his devotion to a Church that constantly uses symbolism in her teaching, accounted for his style of poetry, there were other contributive forces which we may not ignore. Since his mode of expression is not something peculiar to himself, nor to the members of his Church who hap-

pened to be writers, we must seek elsewhere for an explanation of the "conceits" with which his poetry abounds. The "conceit" was in the air; its use was the literary fashion of all the countries of Europe, in every variety of form about the middle of the sixteenth century.<sup>51</sup>

By "conceit" the Elizabethans meant little more than thought, idea, concept, but later, as applied to poetry, it became any apt rhetorical device that beautified the passage. Historically, it cannot be ascribed to the inventiveness of any single poet in England or elsewhere. Its germ might be found in the poetry of the troubadours who exercised their ingenuity in devising compliments for their fair ladies and from this practice developed one of the leading features of the conceit—hyperbole. We may not, however, say that Gongora, who often used allegorical matter to disguise his commonplace subject matter, or Marino who employed metaphor to secure novelty in expression, or any other foreign poet, is specifically responsible for it in English literature.<sup>52</sup> It is generally agreed that the conceit developed under the influence of Petrarch whose poetry indicates a "steady artistic resolve to elaborate a single spiritual paradox; to polish it into the most perfect form of which it is capable; to illustrate it with every variety of image; to adorn it with metaphor and to approach it from a number of different sides until its poetical substance is exhausted." Of Petrarch it must be said that his good taste preserved him from the extravagances of his followers who aimed to outshine the brilliance of their master. In England the doubtful honor of popularizing the conventional "conceit"

<sup>51</sup> Courthope, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

<sup>52</sup> Felix E. Schelling, *English Literature During the Lifetime of Shakespeare*, p. 127.

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goes to Sidney whose use of it in his sonnets established a practice continued by the other lyric poets of England. It might be interesting at this place to state the late Professor Alden's "working definition" of the conceit of Elizabethan lyrists. As a result of much study in this field he suggests: "A conceit is the elaboration of a verbal or an imaginative figure, or the substitution of a logical for an imaginative figure, with so considerable a use of an intellectual process as to take precedence, at least for the moment, of the normal poetic process."<sup>53</sup> He further summarizes the various types found in the Elizabethan lyrics, thus showing the development:

- I Verbal conceits
- II Imaginative conceits
  - (a) Metaphor—simile type
  - (b) Personification type
  - (c) Myth type
- III Logical conceits
  - (a) Paradox type
  - (b) Logical—metaphysical type

From this diagram we can see the opportunities afforded for the fancy of an ingenious poet. "It is obvious," says Dr. Child, "that in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, the Elizabethan became intoxicated with his successful attempts to excel in certain forms of writing; with the splendor of his diction, with the music of his harmonies, with the delight of using rich golden words and phrases characterized by felicitous daring."<sup>54</sup> South-

<sup>53</sup> Raymond MacDonald Alden, *Studies in Philology*, XIV, 2.

<sup>54</sup> C. G. Child, An unpublished essay on the Elizabethan Conceit.

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well displays every variety of conceit, structural and inventional; many indeed that had become old-fashioned he brought back and pressed into the service of religion. He, at times, elaborates his figures almost to the point of absurdity. "St. Peter's Complaint" exhibits many kinds of extravagances; some of the best examples occur in this poem. The eyes of Christ are "pooles of Hesebon," "baths of grace":

O pooles of Hesebon, the baths of grace  
Where happie spirits diue in sweet desires,  
Where saints reioyce to glass their glorious face,  
Whose banks make echo to the angels' quires,  
An eccho sweeter in the sole rebound,  
Then angels' musick in the fullest sound!

and again they call forth from the poet a stranger stanza still:

The matchless eye, matcht onely each by other,  
Were pleased on my ill matched eyes to glaunce;  
The eye of liquid perle, the purest mother,  
Broach't teares in mine to weepe for my mischance;  
The cabinets of grace unlockt their treasure,  
And did to my misdeed their mercies measure.

In another line, a series of metaphors, we see the poet's versatility, aptness, and richness of thought:

Fat soil, full spring, sweet olive, grape of bliss.

The source of this line some trace to the "Litany of Loreto," but there is no apparent reason for the connection unless it be the



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number of images that follow each other in quick succession.

"St. Peter's Complaint" furnishes us with abundant evidence for the unfavorable criticism sometimes made against Southwell's writings. In the Apostle's sorrow there is deep feeling often mistaken for mere sentimentality by those unfamiliar with the Catholic manner of expressing religious devotion. Southwell enters into the spirit of St. Peter's sorrow and his emotion carries him to such depths that his imagination is wrought up to throw off conceits and fancies that some deem irreverent.<sup>55</sup> His defects arise "not from poverty but from imperfectly-managed wealth." The paradox with which the poem abounds might be expected from the theological character of the poem since it embodies the "Catholic view of the nature of Christ and the eternal contrast between the reality of things spiritual and the unreality of the things of this world."<sup>56</sup>

In addition to daring imagery, Southwell employs alliteration and this, even more than his conceits, detracts from his virility, and forces on the reader the notion that he was fond of playing with words. In spite of the faults, we cannot lose sight of the fact that in the profuseness of imagery, there is much beauty and a wealth of phrase and thought. At times, in the midst of effusions he is strikingly sententious and epigrammatic; in fact his use of epigram in the shorter poems is amazing. The poem does not always give the impression of being merely ingenious, full of far-fetched and extravagant conceits; there are many effective stanzas that bear comparison with some of the best in Elizabethan literature. Let us compare one of Southwell's stanzas with an apostrophe of Shakespeare's:

<sup>55</sup> Grosart, p. xcvi.

<sup>56</sup> *Cambridge History of English Literature*, IV, 149.

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Sleepe, Death's allye, obliuion of teares  
Silence of passions, blame of angry sore,  
Suspence of loues, securitie of feares,  
Wrath's lenitue, hearts' ease, storme's calmest shore,  
Senses' and soules' reprieuall from all cumbers,  
Benumbing sense of ill, with quiet slumbers!

Shakespeare's "Macbeth," in which the passage occurs, was written about ten years after Southwell's death:

The innocent sleep,  
Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleave of care,  
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,  
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,  
Chief nourisher in life's feast.

We cannot fail to see the similarity in thought between the greatest poet of the age and one who occupies a small place in Elizabethan fame.

The shorter poems while simpler in style are not entirely free from the faults of his longer poems. The thoughts are never lost in an artificial arrangement of words; paradox and antithesis are less noticeable and a few are "content with a simple but profound symbolism," the most notable being the famous "Burning Babe." The little poem, "New Prince, New Pomp," is unusual, quaint, sincere, and genuinely reverent. The theme is evidently very attractive to the poet—the birth of Christ. In style the poem is not unlike the direct method of the ballad and the resemblance is heightened by the metre which is four iambic lines alternating with three.

There is little variety in Southwell's metre; his longer poems

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are written in the decasyllabic line arranged in stanzas four or six lines long. In "The Burning Babe" he uses the old fourteener, commonly called poulter's measure, a metre strictly English in origin, in fact the very oldest in English poetry and the vehicle of much delightful poetry. Very popular in the Elizabethan period, being used by no less a person than George Chapman in his translation of the "Iliad," it gradually fell into disuse and was especially avoided in serious poetry. Its elements were re-arranged into the short-metre stanza of four beats alternating with three. The fourteener was easy to write because of the regularity of accent and because it saves rimes, but in the hands of weak poets it can become a "jog-trot." It is surprising that Southwell can make this much-abused metre capable of a force and sweetness far surpassing that of the earlier poets, not excepting Wyatt and Surrey. These two poets showed its possibilities, but neither handled it as brilliantly as Southwell in "The Burning Babe." He proved that a poet can use the old long line without making his readers conscious of its monotony. His poetry, on the whole, suffers from a lack of variety in verse forms; he adhered closely to iambic metre, seeking variety in the number of beats in a line. He has an overwhelming preference for masculine rimes, chiefly because of the iambic foot. His shortcomings as a metrist and fondness for alliteration detract from poems otherwise beautiful. The too-frequent introduction of alliteration also takes from the simplicity of his language. However, his language is singularly pure and much freer of Latinisms than would be expected from his training and familiarity with the Latin tongue. He does display a weakness for archaic words which give his poetry a quaint charm. When he writes upon subjects which have frequently occupied his mind his language is vivid, force-

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ful, picturesque. The tone of his poetry differs from the commonplace treatment found in many of the verses of his day. His lyrics are remarkable for their simplicity, facility, and sincerity of sentiment and deserve to take rank with the most effective examples of sacred poetry in our language.<sup>57</sup>

In his own words, his writings are "coarse in respect of others' exquisite labors" but the sympathetic students can find many delicate threads in the coarse web. His ability is generally recognized, for though he lacks art, he has strength, passion, and nobility of thought. The influence on those who immediately follow him in point of time, as well as on those who, at a later day, wrote devout lyrics, is being more and more appreciated. It is manifest in the writings of George Herbert, Henry Constable, and Richard Crashaw. In Crashaw especially, is Southwell's influence apparent. They resemble one another in their ardent devotion to the Church and their fondness for verbal conceits. A comparison between Crashaw's "On the Holy Nativity of Our Lord God" and Southwell's "Burning Babe" will prove interesting and further reveal how much they had in common. Crashaw's verse is radiant and flowing and marked in a high degree by originality but it lacks the pure and simple style of Southwell. The idea in these lines from "Scorn not the Least":

He that high growth on cedars did bestow,  
Gave also lowly mushrooms leave to grow.

may have been suggestive to Blake who wrote in "The Tiger":

When the stars threw down their spears,  
And watered heaven with their tears,

<sup>57</sup> Sir Sidney Lee, *Dictionary of National Biography*, LII, 290.

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Did he smile His work to see?  
Did He Who made the lamb make thee?

Attention has previously been called to the influence that he and Sir Edward Dyer had on each other in at least two poems. Another seventeenth century poet shows a knowledge of Southwell's writings in "The Wreath," and Thomas Hood's famous "Haunted House" possibly had its inspiration in "The Vale of Tears." Comparisons have been made between Goldsmith and Southwell again and again. There is a similarity in the character of their work, but no influence of one upon the other is apparent. Both exhibit the same "naturalness of sentiment, the same propriety of expression and the same ease and harmony of versification." There is a force and compactness of thought in both with occasional quaintness not found in Goldsmith.<sup>58</sup>

Father Southwell's admirers like to discover some connection between him and Shakespeare. More than likely they had seen each other's poetry. In the case of Southwell, there can be no question of his having read the great master's verses because of the direct reference to "Venus and Adonis" in "St. Peter's Complaint." (The Author to the Reader):

Still finest wits are stilling Venus' rose  
In Paynim toys the sweetest vaines are spent.

Interest in this poem is heightened by the fact that there is a reference to Shakespeare himself and that Southwell used the same stanza form as Shakespeare. Moreover, in Southwell's other poems there are many passages that immediately call up

<sup>58</sup> Joseph Angus, *The Handbook of English Literature*, p. 155.

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Shakespeare, for example, in "Man's Civil War" we come across these verses:

My hovering thoughts would fly to heaven,  
And quiet nestle in the sky,  
Fain would my ship in virtue's shore,  
Without remove at anchor lie;

But mounting thoughts are haled down,  
With heavy poise of mortal load;  
And blustering storms deny my ship  
In virtue's haven secure abode.

Shakespeare puts the same idea in "Hamlet":

My words fly up, my thoughts remain below:  
Words without thoughts never to heaven go.

In "Life is But Loss" as well as in "St. Peter's Complaint," Southwell strikes upon notes similar to those sounded in "Macbeth."

Other resemblances to Shakespeare might be pointed out, but they are such as could be found in the writings of any two poets who have plumbed the depths of life. Shakespeare may have read Southwell, yet we have not sufficient evidence for the assertion that the saintly priest's poems had any real influence on the chief dramatist of the age. Shakespeare, in common with other writers of his day, borrowed not only ideas, but long passages and entire plots for his dramatic creations and would not hesitate to use some thoughts he found in the poetry of a Jesuit who had been put to death. In both poets there is a richness of fancy, vivid imagination, and an "inexhaustibleness of



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illustrative resource." On the whole, Southwell appears to have exercised an influence on English literature by arousing an interest in religious poetry, exemplifying in his work that a genuine poet might ignore the strife of the hour and take refuge in thoughts of God and the things of the soul. Grosart adequately estimates Southwell's influence when he says that his poetry is "healthy and strong and more potential in our literature than appears on the surface; and that others of whom more is heard drew light from him as well early as more recent, from Burns to Thomas Hood."

As a religious poet, the writings of Robert Southwell stand high; the verse is marked by strong individuality, vigor and epigrammatic keenness. Like many another Elizabethan he lacked artistic restraint, not creative power. His technical faults did not obscure the charm of poetry which was concerned mainly with God and with man in his direct relationship with the Creator. Southwell occupied a place in an important movement of sensibility and his verse must be studied by those who are interested in the poetry of the generation which followed his. To him belongs the honor of turning poetry in the direction it took in the seventeenth century. The following lines significantly sum up the life and character of one endowed with the gifts of manhood as well as with the spiritual insight and fancy of a true poet:

Poet and Priest and Martyr, three in one—  
A perfect one—a poem in God's sight,  
Fraught with ineffable music, and a light  
Celestial beyond light of star or sun.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>59</sup> *Catholic World*, LXXII, 196.



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- I. Southwell's Works Chronologically Arranged
- II. References



# I

## Southwell's Works Chronologically Arranged

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